SOAS University of London

Roba, Ayele Kebede (2022)
Against the 'Great Tradition': Marginalization and resistance in Ethiopian novels in Afan Oromo and Amharic
PhD thesis. SOAS, University of London
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00037396
https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/37396

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

When referring to this thesis, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given e.g. AUTHOR (year of submission) "Full thesis title", name of the School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

Against the 'Great Tradition'

Marginalization and resistance in Ethiopian novels in Afan Oromo and Amharic

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD in Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies, SOAS, University of London

Ayele K. Roba

April 2022

Abstract

This thesis 'reads together' (Laachir) four novels written in two widely-spoken Ethiopian languages, Afan Oromo and Amharic—*Yoomi Laataa?* [*When Shall It Be*?] (2010) by Isayas Hordofa and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* [*The Black Man from Abbaya*] (1996) by Dhaba Wayessa in Afan Oromo, and *Yeburqa Zimita* [*Burqa's Silence*] (2000) by Tesfaye Gebreab and *Evangadi* (1998) by Fiqremarqos Desta. The novels were published in the two decades following Ethiopia's adoption of ethno-linguistic federalism in 1991, a period of profound political change that saw strong critiques of Ethiopian nationalism but also the emergence of written literatures in many Ethiopian languages, including Afan Oromo. Indeed, the novels both reflect and reflect on these developments.

My approach is contextual and multilingual, i.e., it is fully cognizant of the plurilingual practices embedded in the literary texts as well as the contexts in which they were produced, and it advocates a contextualized and comparative reading that resists the separate and monolingual reading practices that have characterized mainstream Ethiopian literary studies. I view these novels as mediating between different languages, between oral and written traditions, and between narratives of the Great Tradition and that of the counter hegemonic histories, and as such I see them as resisting hegemonic narratives within Ethiopian nationalism and literature. Reading them together involves an entangled reading that seeks illuminate their interwoven politics and is attentive to any echo, if not dialogue, across language boundaries.

Drawing on the genres of historical and village novels, the thesis contests the Amhara-centred Ethiopianist meta-narrative from three perspectives. First, it pits counter-hegemonic historical narratives against the history of the Great Tradition by reworking and reinterpreting Ethiopian political history in ways that foreground the perspectives of politically marginalized people. Second, it argues that these novels critically engage with language ideology and politics, and thereby interprets textual multilingualism as a recognition of the reality of 'multilingual locals' in Ethiopia and a critique of official monolingual policies and Amharic monolingualism (part of the Great Tradition). Third, by analysing the strategies that the novels employ to represent orature and the interplay between orature and written literature, the thesis shows how these novels broaden the remit of what constitutes Ethiopian literature and show orature to be an important resource for counter-hegemonic narratives. Fourth, by reading together Afan Oromo and Amharic novels along these lines, the thesis puts forward a more inclusive approach to Ethiopian literature that crosses linguistic and script boundaries.

Finally, through a comparative and contextual methodological approach that seeks to refute Ethiopianist meta-narratives and exclusionary approaches to literature, the study contributes to the debates about centre-periphery and orature-literature dichotomies in the study of world literature, African literature and to comparative Ethiopian literature (particularly to Oromo literature).

Table of contents

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………………..3

Table of contents……………………………………...………………………………5

Acknowledgements…………………………………………………………………..6

Note on translation…………………………...……………….…………….…..10

Introduction……………………………………………………………………..…...13

Chapter 1: 'History has not repeated itself': Resisting the historiography of the Great Tradition in *Yeburqa Zimita*…..……………………………………………… 67

Chapter 2: The silences of the Great Tradition: Counter-hegemonic narratives in *Yoomi Laataa?* ....……………...…………………………….……………………120

Chapter 3: Literary multilingualism in historical and village novels…………..………176

Chapter 4: 'Novelized orature' in historical and village novels…………..…………….233

Conclusions …………………………………………………...………………………286

References……………………………………………..……………………………306

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt special thanks to my supervisor, Professor Francesca Orsini. Had it not been for Francesca's continuous, rigorous and careful guidance, this thesis would have never taken its current shape. Francesca's support, in my understanding, spectacularly surpasses the responsibilities of an academic supervisor. Hers is unique and multidimensional support that ranges from financial support, language correction, motherly care and counsel on different social issues, to constructive critical evaluation of the arguments I present in this thesis. Francesca has never tired of correcting me whenever I went off the track due to my failure to understand a point or explain myself clearly and sufficiently. I am wholeheartedly grateful for Francesca's unparalleled role in making me a better scholar, and this has dramatically transformed my academic performance regardless of my poor and marginalized background.

Dr. Martin Orwin also deserves special thanks for his attentive guidance during the more challenging early days I joined the program, when I was unable to figure out how I had to deal with academic and social life in London.

I owe special thanks to my friend and colleague Dr. Sara Marzagora, who first attracted me to this PhD programme at SOAS and to the MULOSIGE project. She has played a huge role in making me familiar with comparative literature, including Ethiopian literary studies, which is conflicted and divisive along the linguistic and ethnic lines. Sara invested her time, energy and knowledge starting with helping me application writing, picking me from the airport when I first arrived in the UK, and she helped identifying important places in London that made my stay in London so pleasurable. Sara also introduced me to SOAS, its library and other important places which I could have faced difficulty in discovering them within a short period of time.

I am also thankful for the European Research Council, which generously funded my study through the MULOSIGE project, of which Francesca was the principal investigator. MULOSIGE was a means through which I met great people who have played an incredible role in expanding my understanding of world and comparative literature during reading groups, conference presentations, and different forms of discussions we had together. These include Dr. Karima Laachir, who was also a member of my supervisory committee in the early days, Dr. Fatima Burney, Dr. Itzea Goikolea Amiano, Dr. July Blalack and Dr. Jack Clift and many other friends. The MULOSIGE project coordinators Yvonne Castle, Bethel Worku, Vanessa Kwame and Joe Bingham were helpful in settling several financial issues during my fieldworks.

I am grateful to Mr. Abdulhawas, Dr. Elfineh Uddessa for giving their time and introducing me to different Ethiopian and Oromo restaurants in London. The discussions I had with them enhanced my understanding of the Ethiopian history and politics, and that immensely contributed to my reading of the literary texts. Mr. Abdulhawas deserves special thanks for taking care of my luggage at his home while I was out of London.

My success could not happen without the support, love and care from family and parents. I owe special thanks to my spouse Mrs Alemitu Deno for the love and support she has shown me. She has shouldered all the family responsibilities and taken care of our children, Jaarraa and Milki, while she was still pursuing her studies and working full time. My brother Chuluke and Bone also shared the family burden and helped Alemitu in all ways they could while they were pursuing their studies. The care and support they gave to our children during my long absence from home were remarkable and I am grateful to them. My father Kebede Roba deserves my thanks for he regularly travelled to my home to help my family with advice and prayers.

My sincere thanks go to my friends and colleagues, Mrs Metasebiya Adula, Mr. Abraham Busawa, Mr. Galchu Jarso, Dr. Asebe Regassa, Dr. Balako Gumi, Dr. Asafa Teferra, Dr. Taddesse Jalata, Mr. Miessa Elema and Dr. Taddesse Berisso for their regular encouragement and appreciation. For Dr. Asebe and Dr. Balako, I am really grateful for their continuous advice and solace which became source of energy and inspiration.

My special thanks are due to my father's prayer group in Dogo Wolena Church and in Bule Hora for they regularly refreshed my thoughts and spirits and supported my family through their prayers and regular encouragement during my absence from home.

Lastly, Bule Hora University deserves my heartfelt thanks for allowing my family to stay in the university accommodation. Dr.Chala Wata and Dr. Gumi Boru also deserve thanks for leaving me free during the write-up period. I thank my friend Mr. Kifle Midhadu for shouldering all the office responsibilities during the last days of the write-up period, when I was absent from my duties.

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother, Bati Barisso and grandfather, Roba Dago, who were eager to see success in my academic journey but departed for good before witnessing it! Dear grands, you are always in my thoughts!

Note on translation

All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. I transliterated words in Afan Oromo (Oromo language or Oromo) and Amharic in the following way.

1. **Afan Oromo**

The following key with examples is a guide to Afan Oromo transliteration and pronunciation with examples on *vowels* and *consonants*. I keep the Afan Oromo version of some key words like *geerarsa, Gadaa*, *dhaaduu* and several other names in Oromo literature following the majority of Oromo scholars, who have done the say way.

Vowels

a – short – as /a/ as in *mana* /mana/ = house/ home

aa – long – as /a:/ as in *laafaa* /la:fa:/ = soft, smooth

e – short – as /ɛ/ as in *elmuu* /ɛlmu:/ = milk (v)

ee – long – as /ɛ:/ as in *eegee* /ɛ:gie/ = tail

i – short – as /**i**/ as in *ilaali*/ɪla:l/ = look, see

ii – long – as /**i**:/as in *fiiguu* /fi:gu:/ = run

o – short – as /**o**/as in *boru* /**bo**ru/ = tomorrow

oo – long – as /**o**:/ as in *foon* /fo:n/ = meat

u – short – as /**u**/ as in *muri* /mur/ = cut

uu – long – as /**u**:/ as in *fuula* /fu:la/ = face, page

In Afan Oromo writing, the vowels are doubled orthographically to show long sounds, and they cannot change without a pause or a break by an *apostrophe sign* /'/ or a *consonant* between two vowels. The apostrophe sign is used as a consonant.

Consonants

In Afan Oromo, the glottalized consonants are *c*, *x*, *q* and *ph*. They are commonly described as plosive *ch*, *t*, k, and *p* sounds, respectively.

c- as /**c'**/ as in ***c****ooma* / **c**'o:ma/ = fat (as in *'fat free'*)

q- as /**k'**/ as in ***q****aama* / 'k'a:ma/ = body

x- as **/t'/** as in ***xaxxoo*** /'t'at'o:/ = complex

ph- as **/p'/** as in *tapha* /tapa/ = play

There are also two different consonant letters that count as single consonant sounds: *ph, dh*, *ch*, *sh*, and *ny*.

dh- as **/d'/** as in ***dh**a**dh**aa* /d'ad'a:/ = butter

sh- as **/š/** as in ***sh**aanaa* **/š**a:na:**/** = cabage

ch- as /ʧ/ as in *chaappaa* /ʧa:pa/ = seal

ny- as /**n'**/ as in ***ny**aata /n'a:ta/* = food

When doubled, consonants are stressed or geminated and bring difference in meaning.

For example*: balaa* /bala:/= disaster

ballaa/bal'a:/= blind

2. Amharic

All translations from or to Amharic are also mine unless otherwise stated. In the case of English publications by Ethiopian authors, I have maintained the authors' own transliteration of their own names. For other words, I have followed Sara Marzagora's transliteration scheme, which I found clear and easy to understand, as presented below.

Vowels

1st order	2nd order	3rd order	4th order	5th order	6th order	7th order
ተ = tä	ቱ = tu	ቲ = ti	ታ = ta	ቴ = te	ት = tə	ቶ = to

Consonants

Amharic symbol	Transliteration	Common alternative transliterations	Description	Pronunciation (examples)
ሀ, ሐ, ኀ	ha	--		Like *h* in English *hail*
ለ	lä	--		Like *l* in English *lion*
መ	mä	--		Like *m* in English *mother*
ሠ, ሰ	sä	--		Like *s* in English *sun, song*
ረ	rä	--		Like *r* in Italian/Spanish *rosa*
ሸ	šä	sh		Like *sh* in English *share*
ቀ	ḳä	q	Explosive k	--
በ	bä	--		Like *b* in English *boy*

ተ	tä	--		Like *t* in English *toy*
ቸ	čä	ch, tch		Like *ch* in English *chair*
ነ	nä	--		Like *n* in English *name*
ኘ	ňä	ny, gn, ñ		Like *ñ* in Spanish *piña* Like *gn* in Italian *gnocchi*
ከ	kä	--		Like *k* in English *key*
ወ	wä	--		Like *w* in English *water*
ዘ	zä	--		Like z in English zone
ዠ	žä	j		Like *j* in French *jeudi* Like *s* in English *leisure*
የ	yä	--		Like *y* in English *young, yes*
ደ	dä	--		Like *d* in English *dice*
ጀ	jä	ğ		Like *j* in English *joy*
ገ	gä	--		Like *g* in English *girl*
ጠ	ṭä	--	Explosive t	--
ጨ	č̣ä	ch, tch	Explosive č	--
ጰ	p̣ä	--	Explosive p	--
ጸ, ፀ	ṣä	ts, tz	Explosive s	Like *z* in Italian *ragazzo*
ፈ	fä	--		Like *f* in English *fox*
ፐ	pä	--		Like *p* in English *pear*

Source: Marzagora (2015)

Introduction

At the Oromo Studies Association Conference in Washington DC in August 2014, Tesfaye Gebreab, the author of *Yeburqa Zimita* (*Burqa's Silence*), the Amharic historical novel I present in this study, described how he developed the novel out of his life experiences (Tesfaye 2014). He explained that the idea to write *Yeburqa Zimita*, particularly the story related to Oromo history, emanated from two sources. One of them were the oral stories he heard from the Arsi- Oromo during his visit to the villages in the Arsi land.[1] As heard on the conference speech made by Tesfaye, the Arsi told him that Emperor Menelik's (r.1886-1913) forces amputated the genitals, limbs and breasts of their ancestors and, as a result, they had horrible memories of the Amhara rulers. Both in the novel and in his speech, Tesfaye related these bitter war stories to the story of a river called Burqa. The river is found in Arsi and has two unusual characteristics. First, unlike other rivers in the area, it flows underground at high speed, and can be barely seen clearly except at a few places over its course. Second, its water is poisonous and kills any animal or person who tastes it. Tesfaye said that he wanted to use these aspects of Burqa to symbolize Oromo anger and their bitter war memories. He took the idea of symbolic use of the river from another Amharic writer, Tsegaye Gebremedhin, whose poem he was reading at the time of visiting Burqa. The poem is about Awash, another river in the Oromo land (Oromia). Unlike any other river in Oromia, Awash ends in the sand of the south-eastern desert on the Ethio-Somali boarder.[2] The poem asks and blames Awash for not going further to reach its destination.[3] Tesfaye interpreted this as stagnation in the development of Oromo nationalism. Like Tsegaye's

---

[1] The Arsi-Oromo live in the southcentral Ethiopia and known in the Ethiopian history for their valiant confrontations with the Amhara invading forces led by Emperor Menelik in the late 19th century during the war of occupation/ expansion.

[2] Oromia is one of nine regional states in Ethiopia that formed in 1991 following the introduction of the ethnolinguistic federalism (The Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995). It is the largest region and dominantly inhabited by the Oromo people.

[3] The poem is recently uploaded on You Tube and I have not found the original copy.

poem, Tesfaye's *Yeburqa Zimita* is highly charged with identity politics, but the latter is more explicit in its engagement with identity issues. For example, the Oromo characters like Anole Waqo explicitly advocates for Oromo self-administration and denounces the Amhara domination (see Ch. 1).

Tesfaye's speech is relevant to my study in three ways. First, it shows that his novel is informed by oral traditions, particularly the stories about the war between the Arsi and Menelik's invading force. Such characteristic of the novel, and the way in which orality and orature presented in this novel as well as in other novels (see Ch.4), challenge the stark binarism between orature and literature. This could be, as I show later, one way in which we can start 'reading together' [4] novels in Amharic and Afan Oromo. Second, it shows that the novel is partly based on the history of a marginalized people (the Oromo) which is otherwise never presented by mainstream Amharic novels.[5] Third, the speech indicates how the author is familiar with mainstream Amharic literature: his novel is partly informed by a canonical Amharic writer, Tsegaye, though this is not reflected in the novel. In other words, the novel is informed both by mainstream Amharic literature as well as by the marginalized history and oral tradition of the Oromo people. Tesfaye concluded his speech by stating that denying and excluding non-Amharic literary traditions, like those in Afan Oromo, from mainstream Ethiopian studies is a futile attempt (Tesfaye 2014). Tesfaye's perspective and his fictional representation of Ethiopian history and historical experiences in *Yeburqa Zimita* echo with the idea of Oromo historian Mohammed Hasan (2008a), who advocates for what he calls 'a literature of tolerance and respect' (p.208).

---

[4] See the methodology section for brief discussion of this concept.

[5] The Oromo are usually presented by the Oromo and foreign scholars as the largest ethno-linguistic group in the number of population in Ethiopia, but have been subjected to the multiple marginalization since their occupation by the Amhara emperors since the late 19th century to 1991 (Asafa 1995, 1996, 1998, 2001; Asafa and Schaffer 2010; Ezekiel and Asafa 2003; Holcomb and Sisai 1990).

> It is time to develop literature based on respect for the rights of citizens, their cultures, histories, languages, and civilizations. It is also time that Ethiopian literature draws upon the universal values of all our people's experience instead of focusing only on Amhara and Tigrai political dominance and cultural supremacy. It is also time that a literature of celebration is created; not a celebration of domination, oppression, dehumanization, ignorance, prejudice and destructive hatred, but instead a celebration of human dignity of all our people, their unity in diversity, a literature of tolerance and respect, promoting a pluralistic and free society and a democratic political culture. (Ibid.)

The novels I present in this study reflect the qualities of the literature that Mohammed recommends for multilingual Ethiopia. Isayas Hordofa, an Oromo author I present in this thesis, shares Tesfaye and Mohammed's views. Unhappy with the mainstreamist literary approach to the Ethiopian multiculturalism, in his novel *Yoomi Laataa*? (*When Shall It Be?*), Isayas is not only confined to the Oromo experiences and history.[6] He draws on both oral and written history to compose his novel. While the two other novels, I discuss do not explicitly engage with political-historical narratives, they consciously present oral and/or multilingual worlds that have been marginalized within Ethiopian literature and this is one main reason why I present them in this thesis.

The four novels I discuss in this thesis—two in Amharic (*Yeburqa Zimita [Burqa's Silence]* by (Tesfaye 2000) and *Evangadi* by (Fiqremarqos 1998)) and two in Afan Oromo (*Yoomi Laataa? [When Shall It Be?]* by (Isayas 2010) and *Gurraacha Abbayaa [The Black Man from Abbaya]* by (Dhaba 1996)*)*—were all published between 1990 and 2010, that is, in the two decades after Ethiopia adopted ethno-linguistic federalism in 1991.[7] These two decades in the Ethiopian history saw the fervency of identity politics, mainly based on language

---

[6] In his literary engagement, Isayas does not confine himself only to the Oromo though he writes from the Oromo perspectives. He blames mainstream Ethiopianist writers for favouring and promoting only the Amhara culture and political supremacy. In his novel, *Yoomi Laataa?*, he tries to address the historical themes ignored by mainstream writers. This point is presented in detail in Ch.2.

[7] Except for *Yoomi Laataa?*, which was published in 2010, the other three novels were published between 1991 and 2000. However, as data from the authors show, all the novels were written in the late 1980s and 1990s. Even *Yoomi Laataa?*, according to the author, was started to be written in the 1990s, but it took the author a longer time to make it ready for the publication.

and ethnicity. Though in different degrees, all the novels reflect the impact of ethnic politics as they focus on specific ethno-linguistic groups and their cultures. The novels belong to two genres: historical novels (*Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*) and village novels (*Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*). Compared to the majority other novels in Afan Oromo and Amharic, they are more inclusive in their representation of the Ethiopian linguistic and cultural diversity.

Though a product of the post-1991 political climate, the novels focus on the core issues in the pre-1991 Ethiopian nationalism (see Chs. 1 to 3). They not only foreground counter-hegemonic narratives, but also directly confront some of the main tenets of what historians of Ethiopia call the 'Great Tradition'[8] : these include Amharic monolingualism and the exclusive use of the Sabean[9] script to write for all the languages in the country; Amhara-centred cultural homogenization, as through naming practices wherein names in other languages are changed into Amhara names, and an Amhara-centric perspective and historical narrative that centres the northern highland plateau as the national historical site or centre of the Ethiopian civilization (Clapham 2002; Crummey 2001; Marzagora 2017; Semir 2009; Triulzi 2002).

The selected novels contest the assimilation and homogenization strategies that characterize mainstream Ethiopian literary studies in three ways. First, in their engagement with Ethiopian political history and national historiography, the historical novels pit counter-hegemonic narratives against the narrative of the Great Tradition (see Chs 1 and 2). Second, in their engagement with official language ideology and

[8] The 'Great Tradition' refers to the culture, history, religion, and language of the Amhara people that the Ethiopian rulers worked on for so many years to impose on the other Ethiopian peoples, for they believed that it is an identifying national tradition of Ethiopia. For further discussion, see Ch.2.

[9] The Sabean script is a character used to write the Semitic languages of Ethiopia such as Geez, Amharic, Tigre and Tigrinya. Amharic speakers call it *Fidel*, to mean alphabets. For further information, see Ayele (2003), Degineh (2015),Feyisa (1995), Tilahun (1993) and Ullendorff (1951).

language politics, the novels pit multilingual practices against official monolingualism (see Ch. 3). Third, in engaging substantially with orature, these novels broaden the remit of what constitutes Ethiopian literature and show that orature is an important resource for counter-hegemonic narratives and for the development of literature.

The main aims of this study are, first, to contest and counter the Ethiopianist meta-narrative produced by the assimilation and homogenization strategies of the Amhara ruling class that set out to homogenize the diversity in cultures, languages, literary traditions and historical narratives under the Amhara cultural and political hegemony. Second, to explore how the selected historical and village novels written in Amharic and Afan Oromo foreground counter-hegemonic narratives which are cognizant of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Ethiopian peoples. Third, to assess whether novels in Amharic and Afan Oromo can be put into a dialogue with one another to further refute exclusionist monologic narratives thereby suggest more inclusive approach to such a divided literary field. Lastly, this study tries to develop an integrated conceptual and methodological approach that foregrounds comparative, contextual and multilingual readings of the literary texts in different languages (in this context, Afan Oromo and Amharic) so that it enables us to think beyond the dichotomies that characterize mainstream Ethiopian literary studies such as literature vs orature, the Great Tradition vs ethno-nationalist historical narratives, and national vs regional literatures. I designate this approach as 'contextual and multilingual', and it integrates different literary methods and approaches to examine the narrative strategies used by the historical and the village novels (see the methodology section). In this regard, I understand the novel as a genre that negotiates or mediates between the binaries listed above. To these ends, this thesis takes its cue from the novels themselves to conceptualize competing narratives about Ethiopian political history (the Great Tradition vs counter-hegemonic narratives), language ideology and policy (multilingual

practices vs official monolingualism), and modes of imaginative expressions (orature vs literature) as points of departure to develop a comparative approach to Ethiopian literature.

Before I present the historical background and the conceptual apparatus of this thesis, let me briefly introduce operational definitions of some of the basic terms I use in the thesis: Ethiopia, Ethiopian literature, and mainstream Ethiopian literature. The underlying problem with these expressions is caused by the ideological baggage that the term 'Ethiopia' carries with it in state historiography and political discourse, which implies that Ethiopia is a Semitic and Christian land geographically confined to the former Abyssinia, the northern central high land plateau. Mindful of the controversies over this term, I use the term Ethiopia in Sara Marzagora's (2015) sense, that is, as the modern state formed by Emperor Menelik II (r. 1886-1913), whose current boundaries were demarcated at the beginning of the 20th century, and which is home to more than 80 ethno-linguistic groups. I use the term Ethiopians in the sense used in the 1995 Constitution, as a designation for all the peoples, nationalities and nations living in present-day Ethiopia. Abyssinia is used to refer to the northern highland plateau formerly composed of four regions Tigray, Gondar, Gojam and Shewa before the birth of the modern state of Ethiopia in the beginning 20th century. Finally, the expression Ethiopian literature in its ideal sense, refers all the literary traditions in all Ethiopian languages, and not in the sense presently used in most academic and non-academic writings, which implies that Amharic literature is the only Ethiopian literature. When referring to this position, I use the phrase mainstream Ethiopian literature.

0.1 Ethiopian history and literary studies

Since language is not a purely literary tool, but an inescapably political instrument as well, it is through language that the literary world remains subject to political power.
Pascale Casanova (2004:115)

A historical survey of literary traditions in Afan Oromo and Amharic shows how the support that Ethiopian rulers have given to Amharic through their monolingual policies has consistently boosted Amharic literature and marginalized the literatures in other Ethiopian languages, in this particular context Afan Oromo literature (Degineh 2015; Feyisa 1996; Hayward and Mohammed 1981; Mekuria 1994, 1995, 1997; Mohammed 2010, 2014; Tesfaye 2009, 2019). This section links history to language politics, debates, and literary traditions in the two widely spoken Ethiopian languages. As Casanova indicates in the above quote, language is a bridge through which politics and literature are related. In the same vein, I argue that the language policy adopted by the Amhara nationalists since the mid-19th century has seriously impacted and shaped the literary traditions in Afan Oromo and Amharic.

The formation of the modern state of Ethiopia began with the rise of Emperor Tewodros of the Amhara ethnic group in 1855. Tewodros and his successors first unified the four autonomous regions (Shewa, Gojam, Gondar and Tigray) that eventually formed Abyssinia (Asafa 1995; Bahru 2002; Baxter 1978; Baxter 1986; Eshete 2016; Jeylan 2008; Markakis 2011). Until the project to form the modern state of Ethiopia was eventually completed by Emperor Menelik at the turn of the 20th century, the Amhara rulers undertook a series of military expedition towards south, west and east of the former Abyssinia (Asafa 2001, 2007; Ezekiel 2008). From the very beginning of their expansion, their aim was to impose their culture and religion (the Orthodox Christianity) on the peoples they occupied through the coercive use of Amharic: the languages of the occupied people were banned under the Amhara administration (Asafa 2001; Feyisa 1996; Mekuria 1997; Mohammed 2010). One of the marginalized and forcibly occupied

peoples were the Oromo, the main concern of this study. Along with the ban on the Oromo language, the histories, imaginative expressions (orature and literature) and many other cultural elements of the Oromo people were suppressed and threatened to be eliminated (Ibid). Besides, Ethiopian national history was written from the perspective of the Amhara ruling class, so that the history and perspectives of the dominated people, mainly the Oromo, were systematically manipulated and excluded from the national historiography and other historical writings (Clapham 2002; Ezekiel 2008; Markakis 2011; Marzagora 2017; Mohammed 2008b, 2010; Semir 2009). The attempt, as I show below, was (and remains) to promote the Amhara cultural and political hegemony through the assimilation or elimination of the non-Amhara peoples in the Ethiopian empire.

As I have mentioned above, one main instrument through which assimilation was tried to be realised was the coercive use of Amharic, the language that the dominated peoples were forced to use at the expense of their mother tongues. Scholars like John Markakis (2011), Mekuria Bulcha (1994, 1997), and Mohamed Hassen (1995, 2008) argue that the purpose of the imposition of Amharic (together with many other cultural elements and religion) on the non-Amhara peoples in Ethiopia was to assimilate these peoples to the Amhara culture, and they designate this practice as 'Amharization'. In the words of Mekuria Bulcha (1994), '[t]he purpose of Amharisation was to create a homogeneous Ethiopian society and identity through the medium of Amharic…' (91). The language was spread 'through the school system, the Church-including the foreign missionaries' administrative institutions and not the least, settlement of Amharas in non-Amharic regions' (Ibid). The 'cultural assimilation' promoted by the Amhara ruling class was based on two major assumptions:

> Firstly, the ruling class in Addis Ababa was acutely aware of the dangers of European colonialism. Linguistic and religious homogenization were seen as necessary steps to forge the social cohesion that would protect Ethiopia

> against European expansionist ambitions. Secondly, the Amharic-speaking Ethiopian elites were also moved by the belief in the superiority of their heritage over the cultures of newly annexed peoples. Assimilation was, therefore, a way to uplift and enlighten the 'less-developed' cultures of the southern lowlands. (Marzagora and Ayele 2019:433)

This idea of assimilation was persistently pursued up to the end of Haile Selassie's government (r.1931-1974). Mengistu Hailemariam (r.1974-1991) was less explicit in this regard at least at the policy level, especially in the early years of his regime.

Propped by cultural assimilation, Ethiopia undertook limited modernization, particularly limited schooling. Only missionaries developed basic schooling in regional languages, however, whereas the government exclusively focused on developing and promoting Amharic. Emperor Tewodros was the first to make Amharic the 'official court language' (Molvaer 1997) and language of government bureaucracy in his empire in 1855. In the meantime, the foundation of its modern literature was laid in the last three decades of the 19th century, following the attention that Semitic studies gained in Europe (Taye and Shiferaw 2000). This attention was fruitful as the first novel in Amharic, *Ye Lebb Welled Tarik* (*Story Born of the Heart*) published by Afewerk Gebreyesus in 1908 in Rome (Taye and Shiferaw 2000). Other Amharic writers, notably Hiruy Welde Selassie and Tekle Hawariyat Tekle Mariyam, were able to publish their works in the first quarter of the 20th century through the state publishing houses, and this laid a strong foundation for Amharic literature (Taye 2009; Taye and Shiferaw 2000; Yonas 2010). The exclusive support for Amharic continued until it was interrupted by the Italian occupation in 1936, but it was re-intensified after the liberation, a point I return to below.

As far as Afan Oromo is concerned, it was probably the first language to be targeted by the Amhara rulers and their aides such as the Orthodox Christian clergy. The first attack was noted in 1842, when a German missionary traveller, John Ludwig Krampf, was blocked by the then king of the Shewa region, Sahle Selassie, from re-entering the

Oromo-inhabited areas (Assefa 2015, 2018; Mekuria 1994, 1995, 1997; Tesfaye 2019). The ban was prompted by Krampf's use of the Latin script in his translation of the Bible into Afan Oromo and his suggestion to write the language in that script. This is because the king was unhappy with the use of the Latin script in the region under his jurisdiction (Mekuria 1994; Pankhurst 1976) and believed that the use of the Latin script may attract the European missionaries to his region (Mohammed 2008). Meanwhile, the attempt to lay the foundation for Afan Oromo literature began in the second half of the 19th century, almost at the same time as Amharic (Asafa 2019; Mekuria 1995; Mohammed 2014). Unlike Amharic literature, Afan Oromo literature was begun by Oromo children who were sold into slavery and were later freed by the missionaries. A group of manumitted Oromo children commonly known as 'Munkullo Team'[10] (Asafa 2019)—comprising Onesimos Nesib, Aster Ganno and others—published the first Oromo reader, which includes folksongs, proverbs, riddles and a collection of vocabularies; and translations of religious texts including the Bible in Afan Oromo in the late 19th century (Degineh 2015; Mekuria 1995; Mohammed 2008a). Mindful of the dispute over the use of the Latin script in Ethiopia, the Munkullo Team used the Sabean script in their translations and writings (Mekuria 1997; Marzagora and Ayele 2019). However, regardless of the team's compliance with the government's policy regarding script, the leader of the team, Onesimos, was accused by the priests of the Orthodox Church for preaching in Oromo language. As a result, he was tried before Emperor Menelik and eventually prevented from teaching and preaching in Afan Oromo (Degineh 2015;

[10] According to Asafa Teferra (2019), 'Munkullo is an inland village in today's Eriteria, 5.6 kilometers from the coastal city of Massawa, from where civets, gold, ivory, and slaves were exported, and spices, milk, garments, carpets and weapons imported. It was in Munkullo that the Swedish Missionary School opened in 1866. The missionaries trained Oromo speakers, who often were emancipated slaves, to act as language informants for future missions in Oromo-speaking regions. Onesimos Nasib (c. 1856-1931) and Aster Ganno Salban (c. 1872-1964) were the leading intellectual figures of this 'miniature Oromo academy in exile', in Mekuria Bulcha's words. It is Onesimos and Aster along with the other Oromo children called the Munkullo Team.'

Mekuria 1995 and Mohammed 2008). The continued assault on the attempts to write Afan Oromo, and particularly the ban of Onesimos not to teach the Oromo, had adverse effect on the development of Afan Oromo and its literature. After the death of Menelik in 1913, control over the languages used in the provinces was loosened because of the power struggle at the centre of the empire (Mekuria, 1994). This became an opportunity for Onesimos to resume teaching and preaching in Afan Oromo. Similarly, the missionaries who operated in the regions inhabited by the Oromo used Afan Oromo in their schools and church services (ibid). This contributed to the development of Afan Oromo and its literature, which however remained oral. Some important works published by foreign scholars like Enrico Cerulli (1922) were in fact collections of orature. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia contributed to the development of Ethiopian languages other than Amharic, and the colonial administration introduced a policy that encouraged the use of the Ethiopian languages other than Amharic including Afan Oromo (Mekuria 1994; Jeylan 2008; Tesfaye 2019).

Following the eviction of the Italians from Ethiopia in 1941, in the context of post-WWII nation-building, a harsh monolingual policy was introduced by Emperor Haile Selassie. As in many postcolonial states, multilingualism was perceived as a problem and weakness. Haile Selassie interpreted the Italian language policy as a threat to national unity and came up with more strictly monolingual policy that prohibited the use of any Ethiopian language other than Amharic (Mohammed 2008; Mekuria 1994). Through a decree that came into effect in 1944, the emperor forced missionaries to conduct religious services only in Amharic (Mekuria 1994). Above all, the 1955 Revised Constitution of the Haile Selassie government secured '…the institution of Amharic as an official language and medium of instruction in elementary schools throughout the empire…' (Mekuria, 1994:100). At the same time, the Haile Selassie government gave strong support to Amharic literature. First, the National Academy of Amharic

Language was established with the aim of 'fostering the growth of Amharic and the development of Amharic literature'[11] (Mekuria 1994). Second, a prize programme for Amharic literature was also introduced after the emperor's own name, called the Haile Selassie I Prize (Degineh 2015). Third, the Ethiopian Writers' Association (EWA) was founded by the writers and patrons of Amharic literature with the specific objective of boosting Amharic literary practice even though the name signifies a wider spectrum (Dereje 2011). The EWA was supported by the Haile Selassie government and, later, by Mengistu government (ibid). This institutional support successfully achieved its purpose, and many scholars of Amharic literature testify that the period between 1941 and 1974 was very productive in the history of Amharic literary development, with many canonical Amharic novels published during this period (Molvaer 1997; Yonas 2010). However, the policy seriously hampered the development of Oromo literature, for example, a prominent Oromo writer, Sheik Bakri Saphalo, was arrested by the Haile Selassie government and forced to leave Ethiopia by the Mengistu government for his commitment to develop Oromo literature (Mekuria 1994; Mohammed 2008). Besides Saphalo, in the 1960s, the Oromo students at Haile Selassie I University (currently Addis Ababa University) used to write in Oromo language and clandestinely circulating their publications among themselves, especially during the popular Ethiopian Students' Movement (Ibid).

In 1974, the military government led by Mengistu Hailemariam took power. Though Mengistu promised reforms with respect to language and land (Mekuria 1994), in practice he went further in promoting the status of Amharic, particularly, in the education sector by making it 'a medium of instruction at the secondary school level' with a very insignificant commitment to develop other languages (Alemseged 2004,

[11] Negarit Gazeta,'Foundation of the National Academy of the Amharic Language' (1972), quoted in Mekuria (1994).

2013; Bender 1985; Bender, Cooper, and Ferguson 1972; McNab 1990; Milkessa 2015). Eventually, Mengistu's military government 'declared Amharic as the only official language of Ethiopia' in its 1987 Constitution (Bender 1985:273). In Bender's words, '[t]he military government which replaced the Haile Selassie regime in Ethiopia in 1974 has followed much the same language policy as its predecessor: promoting Amharic as national language' (1985:ibid).[12] These policies have seriously impacted literary traditions in Ethiopia, as the government controlled literary practices and manipulated them for the purpose of state political propaganda, and an intense censorship was undertaken which discouraged even Amharic writers (Melakneh 2005).

Amharic literary tradition during the Derg/ Mengistu regime (r. 1974-1991) was marked by a postcolonial language debate between the colonial and indigenous languages, and particularly, in Ethiopia it turned into a debate between Amharic and 'mother tongues', that is, other Ethiopian languages (i.e., Amharic itself is not a mother tongue for many Amharic writers).[13] Frustrated by the strict Derg censorship, Amharic writers turned their attention to translation, which contributed to the birth of comparative literature in Ethiopian literary studies (Melakneh 2005). Some writers, such as Sahle Selassie Berhane Mariam, also resorted to writing in English— not only to evade censorship, but also as an intellectual exercise with the intention to making their works accessible to the broader audience at the global level (Ibid).

[12] The Derg declared its recognition of linguistic diversity and other democratic rights, stated in Article 5 of the 'National Democratic Revolution Programme of Socialist Ethiopia' (1976): 'The right of self-determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism . . . each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic and social life, use its own language'. (quoted in Bender 1985:273)

[13] Derg means committee, the military dictatorial government that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987 under Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam.

As in other postcolonial literatures, the question of which language should be used to write the literatures in Ethiopia was a matter of concern to Amharic writers. For example, Asfaw Damte (1981) and Mengistu Lemma (1965, 1973), argued that language should be the only criteria to define Ethiopian literature and if an Ethiopian writer produces a creative work in any foreign language, the work belongs to the literature of the language in which it is written, so it is not Ethiopian literature (Kurtz 2007). An opposite stand was held by Sahle Sellassie (1982), whose first language was Gurage and published a novel (*Shinega's Village* 1964) in his mother tongue. For him, 'the life portrayed' in a literary text should be used as a defining criterion to determine the literary tradition to which a work belongs (Kurtz 2007; Melakneh 2005). However, Sahle Selassie did not defend Gurage or wanted it to be considered a language of Ethiopian literature, rather he was defending English at the expense of writing in indigenous languages. Even though he wrote a novel in his mother tongue, paradoxically he also believed that to write in one's mother tongue is to be local and threatens the national common identity (Sahle Sellassie 1982; Kurtz 2007). As the dispute went on, these writers, particularly Asfaw and Mengistu, suggested translation as a solution for the dispute over language use for the Ethiopian literature, but this suggestion was also in favour of Amharic. They concluded that literary works should be translated into Amharic to be considered Ethiopian literature (ibid). Therefore, notwithstanding their occasional reference to the indigenous languages, these three writers supported monolingualism in favour of Amharic or English. This could be considered an example for the influence of the monolingual policy in literary studies in Ethiopia. To mention another supportive example, Oromo writer Gaddisa Birru, the author of the first Afan Oromo novel, *Kuusaa Gadoo* [*A Pile of Resentment*] (1991), told me in an interview that he was requested by the Derg officials to translate his novel into

Amharic, otherwise it would not get published. However, he refused and get his novel published after the fall of the Derg regime.[14]

Post-1991 Ethiopian literary practices in Afan Oromo and Amharic entered a new phase and, for example, some novels in both languages are characterized by the competing narratives about the Ethiopian national history and fictional representation of the Ethiopian cultures.[15] This phase was influenced by the political change following the country's adoption of the ethno-linguistic federalism as a new form of government structure unlike the previous unitary system upheld by Haile Selassie and Mengistu Hailemariam. The new government of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) that came to power in 1991 conferred a constitutional recognition on all Ethiopian languages and also allowed the promotion of the cultures

[14] In the preface of the novel, the author writes, '*Afaan biraatit hiikamee jabeenyii fi yareenyi isaa yoo hubatameen booda'* [The novel could be published only when translated into *another language* and its strength and weakness were assessed] (Gaddisa 1991:2). Following the approval of *Qubee (*the Latin derivative Oromo alphabet) to write Oromo, Oromo literary tradition has shown a very remarkable progress (Mohammed 2008). Asafa (2009) has done a survey of Oromo literature and identified that the novel has shown a notable progress regardless its short age. Between 1991and 1993, ten novels with very good quality were published. Then after, for more than a decade, significant development was not observed. However, after 2005, it relatively began to develop quickly and by the end of 2014, there was about 207 Oromo novels on the market (Teferi 2015). As a result of the absence of the government support, and publishing and distribution houses committed to Oromo literature, the publication and circulation of Oromo novels have been very limited. To alleviate this problem, the Oromo Writers Association was established in 2011, but it has been subjected to political assault and eventually the founding members have been targeted by the government forces- some of them have been arrested while others have been forced to leave the country.

[15] Novels by a few Amharic writers like Fiqremarqos Desta and Wendimu Kebede present cultures and histories of the non-Amhara peoples in Ethiopia. As we see in this thesis, Fiqremarqos is known for his works on the Hamar people. Wendimu Kebede though less known published a novel *Yesilicha Nejiwoch* (2016) about the culture of the Dawuro people and their encounters with Amhara rulers. The Dawuro are a minority people who live in the southwestern Ethiopia. The novel criticizes the Ethiopian imperial administration in the context of the Dawuro people and presents the social crises that the Dawuro were subjected to under the Amhara rulers. One reader whose testimonial is printed on the backside cover of the novel suggested the translation of the title in English as *Freedom Riders*. There are several Oromo writers, who include perspectives of the people other than the Oromo. These include Isayas Hordofa, Dhaba Wayessa, Gaddisa Birru and others.

of the ethno-linguistic groups in the country. However, in practice Amharic remained the only working language of the federal government.[16]

The impact of the political change is reflected in literary practices: themes of identity politics, history, oral tradition, language and culture of the marginalized peoples became the concern of emerging literatures, for example Afan Oromo novels. There are also a few novels in Amharic which reflect the similar commitment. The authors I present in this study acknowledge and positively represent the experiences and cultures of different ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Of these writers, the authors of the historical novels, Tesfaye and Isayas, have incorporated into their works themes of the exploitation, identity politics, history, oral tradition of the marginalized ethnic groups, while the authors of village novels, Fiqremarqos and Dhaba, deviate from the literary standard and protocol of the canonical Amharic novels, for example, by intermingling the phrases and sentences in the minority languages into their novels, by presenting neglected themes or entirely oral world, and by expanding beyond spatial imagination of Amharic canonical novels as well as Afan Oromo novels. In short, these authors resist the marginalization of the occupied peoples and the literary/linguistic homogenization. More importantly, the novels, for example, the historical novels present a variety of genres of orature, counter hegemonic histories and different languages, and use more than one script thereby they foreground cultural and linguistic diversity in Ethiopia. The novels selected for this study engage with these themes, from three perspectives (political history, language ideology and politics, and oral imaginative expressions) as we see in Chapters 1 to 4.

Regardless the policy level recognition given for multilingual practices, some Ethiopianist scholars like Edward Ullendorff (1960, 1973) and Gerard (1968, 1971), and

---

[16] Article 5 (2)of the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia stipulates that 'Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government.'

Amharic mainstream writers such as Asfaw (1981a), Mengistu (1973) and Sahle Sellassie (1982) continue to advocate the domination of Amharic and present its literature as the only representative of Ethiopian literature. As a result, they present the Ethiopian literary tradition as 'one and single' by crediting its development exclusively to the Semitic Ethiopian languages, namely, Amharic and Geez. For example, the first critical anthology of 'Ethiopian' literature, *Silence is not golden: a critical anthology of Ethiopian literature*, edited by Taddesse Adera and Ali Jimale(1995), a collection of eleven critical essays on different genres of literature in Amharic and Geez, does not acknowledge the presence of emerging literary traditions in other Ethiopian languages. Other good examples are the encyclopaedia essays which are usually presented under the entry of Ethiopian literature. For example, an essay by Tewodros (2004) published in the *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* presents the literature in Geez and Amharic as the only literature in Ethiopia without mentioning, at least, the literatures in other Ethiopian languages. However, he acknowledges only Ethiopian literature in English as a promising area of literary field while literatures in Afan Oromo and Tigrinya had already been established in their own departments in Ethiopia including Addis Ababa University where Tewodros teaches. Similar trend is noted in review articles by Molvaer (2003), Taye and Shiferaw (2000) and Taye (2009). Lastly, one important example worth mentioning is the case of Amharic literary magazine *Bilen*[17]. The magazine is owned by the Ethiopian Writers' Association, which is exclusively dedicated to Amharic literary tradition regardless of the wider spectrum that its name invokes. The working language of the magazine is Amharic, though it promises, in its editorial policy, to publish works in other Ethiopian languages. However, no single work has been published in the magazine in Ethiopian languages other than Geez and

[17] *Bilen* is an Amharic word which literally means the centre of the iris of the human eye/pupil/ that enables a person sees the world. Thus, *Bilen*, the literary magazine, serves a 'pupil' for Amharic literature.

Amharic in any genres since its establishment in the 1960s to date (Ayele 2019). To sum up, the expression 'Ethiopian literature' in all the contexts discussed above is used to mean Amharic or Geez literature, unless when it is clearly stated as Ethiopian literature in Amharic or in English. As Marzagora and Ayele (2019) argue, the above instances shed the light on the persistent bias in Ethiopian literary scholarship towards the literatures in different Ethiopian languages.

In the midst of the continued marginalization and exclusion of Oromo history, world views and over all socio-cultural values from mainstream Ethiopian literary tradition and state historiography, the relationship between the Amhara and the Oromo has become even more antagonistic, and this is also reflected in their novels.[18] However, through comparative 'reading together' of the novels in two languages, as I mentioned earlier, this study aims to develop a framework (the contextual and multilingual) for the reading that takes into account multilingual realities, possible shared elements, oral tradition and ideological thrust between the novels in different Ethiopian languages with particular reference to Afan Oromo and Amharic novels. To this end, the study addresses the following research questions. The questions are clustered based on the major themes they address.

How do historical novels engage with Ethiopian political history and the national historiography, given their positionality in different literary and linguistic traditions? How do the novels appropriate and rework the historical accounts and re-interpret

---

[18] Amharic popular novels either totally exclude the Oromo like in *Oromay* (1983) or reduce them to a very minor status and with negative roles as in *Keadmas Bashager [Beyond the Horizon] (*1970) by Baalu Girma. The novels like *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* [*Love unto Grave*] (1965) by Haddis Alemayehu negatively portray the Oromo characters and *And Lennatu [His Mother's only Son] (1969]* by Abbe Gubenya address them by derogatory expression. The Oromo novels are more critical even as they use the Amhara characters to portray the injustice committed on the Oromo and other Ethiopian people. For example, the protagonists in Afan Oromo novels such as *Godaannisa [The Scar] (1993)* by Dhaba Wayessa, *Kuusaa Gadoo* [*A Pile of Resentment*] (1991) by Gaddisa Birru and *Hawwii* (2009) by Isayas bear Amhara names and used them to represent the historical oppressive Amhara landlords in the Oromo lands.

historical events so as to foreground the perspectives of politically marginalized people on the Ethiopian national historiography or Ethiopianism as a collective identity? How are counter-hegemonic narratives represented and juxtaposed alongside the narratives of the Great Tradition?

How and why are these Amharic and Oromo novels open to multilingualism? Is it a recognition of the reality of multilingual locals in Ethiopia? Or a critique of official monolingual policies and Amharic monolingualism as part of the Great Tradition? Or of other stances vis-à-vis language identities? How do the novels mediate between monolingual narrative and multilingual discourse? What are the strategies through which the multilingual realities and practices in Ethiopia are represented in historical and village novels? What contribution do they make to the study of multilingualism in literature more broadly?

How and why do historical and village novels foreground the interface or interplay between orature and literature in general with particular focus on an examination of the role of the novel in mediating the interface between literature and orature? What strategies do the novels employ in incorporating different genres of orature? How can the incorporation of such oral imaginative elements be used to foreground the often-marginalized voices of non-Amhara and non-Christian ethnic groups which have had no written traditions up to recent times?

Can the novels in Amharic and Afan Oromo be read together, and on what grounds? What methodological and conceptual approach do we need to read them together? And what does the reading together of the select historical and village novels demonstrate about their representation of historical narratives, language ideology and its politics, and the interplay between the novel and orature?

0.2 A contextual and multilingual approach

The critical reading approach I develop in this thesis is 'contextual and multilingual'. This approach is 'contextual' because extratextual factors such as the political, historical, cultural and linguistic context deeply affect the novels I examine and the approach takes these into account. These novels were all produced in the decade following the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, a period that witnessed profound political change, the critique of Ethiopian nationalism and the emergence of written literature in Afan Oromo and several other Ethiopian languages. Though written in different languages and from different political positions, the four novels all reflect the possibilities opened by this moment of challenge to Ethiopia's Great Tradition and the long-standing monolingual language ideology. My approach is also 'multilingual'. Multilingualism is one aspect of context—for Ethiopia is a multilingual country—, but I want it to highlight it primarily to resist and contest the separate and monolingual reading practices that have characterized mainstream Ethiopian literary studies. Instead, this thesis advocates a multilingual reading that crosses linguistic and script boundaries. More specifically, the contextual and multilingual approach of this thesis brings together novels written in Amharic and Afan Oromo, fully cognizant of the plurilingual practices and reality embedded in literary texts as well as in the contexts in which they were produced.

This contextual and multilingual approach draws on the comparative framework of 'reading together' introduced by Karima Laachir (2016) to study postcolonial Moroccan novels in Arabic and French. Such an approach contests conventional reading practices that view Arabic and French novels as 'independent traditions with the presupposition that they have no impact on each other, thereby reifying each tradition. They also ignore the similar historical, social and cultural context from which these novels emerge,

and tend to reinforce the marginalization' (Laachir 2016:22). For Laachir, 'reading together' is

> an entangled reading that sheds light on the *interwoven aesthetics and politics* of Moroccan postcolonial novels in Arabic and French expression, and how they have been *in dialogue with each other*, not only in *responding to the same social and political contexts* but also in terms of their intertwined aesthetic influences. (Laachir 2016:32 emphasis added)

In 'reading together' Indian village novels written in English, Hindi and Urdu in the same region of north India, Francesca Orsini has taken a slightly different approach: instead of taking for granted that works produced in the same multilingual region but in different languages as interconnected, she frames 'reading together' as a set of questions: 'were [these works] in dialogue? Did they respond to the same social and political contexts? And did they reveal intertwined aesthetic influence?' (Orsini 2017). As I show in this thesis, this approach is useful to question monolingual reading practices even in a more conflicted and unequal multilingual literary field such as that of Ethiopia, and to highlight echoes and possible dialogues across works written in different languages. In this respect, my study expands Laachir's and the MULOSIGE project's concept of 'reading together'. Unlike Moroccan literatures in Arabic and French, the literatures in Amharic and Afan Oromo do not share the same historical, cultural, and political context, and more specifically their novelistic traditions have not been informed by similar oral traditions and orature. For this reason, this study suggests a reading together of texts in the two mutually hostile languages and it does not necessarily look for commonalities but considers the political and ideological purposes that these texts promote or share. Such an approach links formal narrative elements such as setting, spatiality, narrator and focalization, the language of the novel, with extradiegetic ideologies and critical interventions that the novels seek to make. This is why 'contextual narratology' is the most appropriate reading practice for these novels (see 0.2.2 below). In so doing, this study contributes to the MULOSIGE approach.

While the MULOSIGE focuses on multilingual and contextual aspects in the study of literature, it does not provide specific reading techniques particularly in the context of narrative studies. In this regard, my study complements MULOSIGE by proposing a specific reading method that combines themes/content with form/language and context. This approach combines critical terms from MULOSIGE with a narratological toolkit and Bakhtin's theory of the novel (see below) in the service of the major purposes of MULOSIGE: foregrounding and promoting multilingualism, located perspectives and the significance of orature in the study of literature, which in turn make visible the marginalized voices.[19] Historical novels and village novels are particularly suited for this approach, for reasons I will explain. While the MULOSIGE project has tried to make an intervention into the field of world literature, my study focuses on national literature as a crucial arena of struggle. My study shows how, in the cases of a highly contested national literary field such as the Ethiopian one, the multilingual approach of MULOSIGE produces new questions and makes visible non-canonical texts and narratives in non-national languages.

A contextual and multilingual approach does not aim to replace the monolingual readings, rather it presents an alternative to conventional (split) reading practices that is mindful of multilingual realities and practices, of the context of a divided literary field and oppressive state nationalism, as well as of textual strategies and narrative techniques. Not only is this framework attentive to the multilingual practices embedded in the local contexts from which the novels emerge and which the novels thematise. It also recognises the relevance of oral imagination that make the background for the

[19] In doing so, I agree with Ansgar Nünning (2009) who attempts to develop a kind of narratology a 'cultural narratology' where he works to '[put] the analytical toolkit developed by narratology to the service of a context-sensitive interpretation of narrative' (p.50). He further argues, 'any literary or cultural historian who wants to address ethical, ideological, or political issues raised in or by narratives can, therefore, profit from the toolbox that narratology provides' (p.63).

novels. Moreover, it seeks to establish a dialogic relationship between the novels so as to develop a multilingual approach to literary history and reading practices. In order to best understand these key aspects of 'reading together', my contextual and multilingual approach draws on the concepts of 'multilingual locals' and 'significant geographies' (Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini 2018b, 2018a), 'dialogism' and 'heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 1981, 1984a) and on 'contextualist narratology' (Chatman 1990; Nünning 2009; Helms 2003). But before I discuss these concepts, let me dwell on the particularities of the Ethiopian case.

Ethiopian literature presents a different outlook from that of Moroccan and North Indian literatures. For one thing, the effect of colonial rule and colonial language education on the Ethiopian literary tradition was insignificant given that the Italian administration was so short-lived, and also though it highlighted multilingualism (Marzagora 2019). Rather, what we have in Ethiopia is a case of 'internal colonialism' by the Amhara and Tigrayan elites (Asafa 1998; Jeylan 2006; Marzagora 2015). Ethno-nationalist and unionist (Ethiopian or Amhara) political ideologies have made the Ethiopian literary field a contested terrain. Novels written in Amharic and Afan Oromo appear at odds with each other, influenced by the hostile historical relationship between the Amhara administrators and the Oromo. Novels written in the languages marginalized by Amhara nationalism and its monolingual ideology (see below) 'reflect the concepts and vocabulary of postcolonial discourse…'(Garuba 2009:257). First, they 'write back'(Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989) to the Amhara cultural and political hegemony and present the alternative view of Ethiopian history and historiography, language ideology and the oral literary imagination. Second, Afan Oromo writers in their works rewrite the stereotypical representation of the Oromo in Amharic literature

and Ethiopian state historiography and seek to redefine Oromo identity (*Oromummaa*).[20] In fact, most Afan Oromo novels reflect the potency that Robert Young (2013) observes in postcolonial literature in exploring 'the effects upon subjective and social experience of the historical residues of colonialism, including language itself' (p.31). Specifically, themes of nationalism, resistance, the pursuit of freedom, ethnicity and identity politics, and gender violence and sexual exploitation abound in Afan Oromo novels.[21] In this way, Afan Oromo writers expand the scope of Amharic novels narratively, spatially and thematically. By contrast, except for very few works by authors like Tesfaye Gebreab, whose novel *Yeburqa Zimita* I analyse in this thesis, most Amharic novels do not challenge Amhara nationalism.[22]

Yet, despite the antagonism existing between Amharic and Afan Oromo literature, the novels I study in this thesis rework the history of Amhara domination and re-visit the same historical events, albeit from different angles. While most Amharic novels have tended to promote Amhara identity and reproduce its cultural domination over all other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, Tesfaye's *Yeburqa Zimita* and even Fiqremarqos' *Evangadi* challenge the assimilationist discourse of the Amhara cultural and historical hegemony.[23] Their novels, as well as Isayas's *Yoomi Laataa*? and Dhaba's *Gurraacaha Abbayaa,* attempt to redefine Ethiopia by expanding and diversifying its spatial and conceptual horizons so that, for them, Ethiopia does not only mean the historical

[20] *Oromummaa*, literally means Oromoness in Afan Oromo and signifies the common identity of the Oromo people across the different regions where they live (Asafa 2007).

[21] Endalkachew Guluma (2017) and Teshome Egere (2013) present some of these points in their analysis of Afan Oromo novels.

[22] By contrast, Fiqremarkos Desta's, *Evangadi*, another novel in Amharic I analyse in this study, presents in the non-Amhara ethnic groups that live in southern Ethiopia but is silent about Amhara 'internal colonialism' and instead criticizes the influence of the foreign culture on the Ethiopian people in general.

[23] Amharic novels like *Keadmas Bashager* and *Oromai* by Baalu Girma, *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* by Haddis Alemayehu and *And lenaatu* by Abbe Gubenya ignore the presence of the non-Amhara ethnic groups and address some ethnic groups in derogatory terms or present the characters from the non-Amhara ethnic groups as very minor and weak. On the other hand, the Amhara characters are extrovert, assertive, confident and wise in most cases.

northern highland plateau inhabited by the Amharas and Tigrayans, as in mainstream historical narratives. 'Reading together' these novels and the common historical narratives they draw upon therefore creates echoes between them in the reader's mind. It makes us look for intertexts beyond the confines of language. For example, as I mentioned in the beginning, the symbolic use of Burqa River in the Amharic novel *Yeburqa Zimita* is inspired by Tsegaye Gebremedhin's poem about Awash River, which Tesfaye interprets as a symbolic representation of the Oromo nationalism as mentioned in the previous section. Sometimes this is a conscious echo: during my interviews with Afan Oromo writers, Gaddisa Biru and Isayas Hordofa mentioned that they were familiar with Amharic novels as they read and inspired by these works. Isayas even stated that he drew on narrative techniques like characterization, mixing real and fictional characters towards realistic narrative effects used by Amharic writers like Berhanu Zerihun, Baalu Girma and Abbe Gubenya, for his historical novel, *Yoomi Laataa?*[24]

Though revisionist from different angles, the selected novels reveal similar *patterns* that enable us to put them in dialogue with each other even though we cannot find direct contact between them. My reading together is therefore based on what the MULOSIGE project team calls 'relation … and patterns rather than direct contact or connections' (Laachir et al. 2018b). The three 'patterns' I have identified are: (a) historical revisionism of the Great Tradition; (b) making visible the multilingual reality of Ethiopian society; and (c) including orature within the novel and foregrounding the interface between orature and literature. Besides, there are also some common narrative strategies I used to read the novels together. The major ones include shifting narrators and featuring (illiterate) characters as focalizors in order to challenge dominant historical and political

[24] These are Amharic authors who are known for producing substantive novels in Amharic including historical novels like *And Lennatu* (Abbe 1969) and *Oromai* (Baalu 1983).

perspectives, or geographical settings that vary from or broaden those of mainstream Amharic novels, strategies of speech representation and dialogism. These three themes—revising political history, challenging monolingualism, and highlighting oral traditions—form the main chapters of the thesis. In the subsequent sections, I introduce the major concepts that help me develop conceptual and methodological approach of the study.

0.2.1 Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies

A multilingual approach, according to Orsini (forthcoming), requires that we 'challenge the ethno-linguistic categories that align script, language, community, and nation and ignore the multilingualism inherent in people, places and texts' (6). This approach takes the 'multilingualism within society and literary culture as a structuring and generative principle' (Orsini 2015:346), and maintains that the presence of several languages within a person, a space, or a society necessarily produces plurality and heterogeneity. Fictional texts may or may not signal such multilingual realities through different textual strategies, such as 'traces of or echoes of other language in the form of references to, or words or phrases in the other language' (Orsini 2014:434). As we shall see, for example, the Oromo novel, *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, bears traces of the Gumuz language in the names of Gumuz characters and some other phrases (Ch. 3).

Space, in geographer Doreen Massey's (2005) pluralising, located and open-ended conceptualization, can be a powerful tool, too, and one that novelists readily use.[25] If Amhara nationalism reinforces a single, top-down view of Ethiopia, a located

[25] Space, for Massey, is 'the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (2005:9). It is 'the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity.' For Massey, space and plurality are co-constitutive: 'Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space' (Ibid.).

perspective shows that views change according to one's position and positionality.[26] The two historical novels I analyse, *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*, consciously introduce several 'multilingual locals' where characters have differential levels of linguistic expertise. The multilingual locals in the Afan Oromo novel *Yoomi Laataa?* include the Hararge region in the eastern Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ambo and its surrounding area in central Ethiopia, Naqamte in western Ethiopia, and Khartoum in Sudan. Hararge, Addis Ababa, Naqamte and Ambo are all in Oromia region, but play different roles in the novel. Hararge is where Oromo farmers work for the paternalistic Amhara landlord Getaw, who has learnt Afan Oromo in order to speak to them despite of his father—one of Menelik's soldiers—expressly forbade him to do so (Isayas 2010). Despite his fluency, Getaw holds demeaning views of the Oromo and their language, which he calls '*Afaan Qottuu' (*the farmers' language) (p.12). Addis Ababa is not an Oromo city for Getaw and his Amharic monolingual wife. For his driver Wariyo and mistress Sintolinna, who both have to learn Amharic in the capital, Afan Oromo is a private and culturally loaded language. Finally, Ambo is the site where, several decades later, the students mobilized by the Derg regime engaging with Amhara landlords for land reform are able to speak to the landlords in Amharic and to the farmers in Afan Oromo. Nevertheless, a multilingual local is not a site without tensions, since the interactions that take place there reflect competing voices vying with each other, and this in turn enhances the dialogism in the novels.

The multilingual locals in the Amharic novel *Yeburqa Zimita*, which focuses on the years of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) struggle, include Eritrea and Asmara,

---

[26] 'Location, then, … is not simply a geographical, historical, or cultural context but a standpoint, a position, an orientation, a necessarily partial and particular perspective, however complex, ample and multiversal it may be, from which a writer represents and imagines his or her worlds' (Orsini and Zecchini 2019:2). Jack Clift (2021) also adds, '[t]he 'multilingual local' can therefore be polyvalent: it implies not only a geographic 'localness' that pushes against the unitarising logic of world literature, but a 'locatedness' that recognises the particularities of the author and the genre in which they write, too' (p.234).

the Tigray region, Naqamte, Addis Ababa, and Burqa and its neighbouring villages in Oromia region. In the novel, Tigray is a site of the new possibilities with the TPLF, including a positive attitude to multilingualism. Hawani, the young Oromo woman who is shadowing the TPLF commander Hayelom, finds herself in an isolated school and tries to speak Tigrinya in order to communicate with the schoolchildren, who know no other language and derive much merriment from Hawani's attempt. Eritrea instead works as a space of treacherous multilingualism: when Hawani's brother Anole Waqo, an Oromo nationalist working for the Derg government in the ministry of national security affairs, travels to Asmara, he is greeted by Rosa, who speaks to him in 'heavily accented Amharic' and delights him by using the Oromo name, Finfinne, for Addis Ababa. Rosa is in fact a spy. As for Burqa, it is a rural area where Oromo live side by side with Amhara colons, who are descendants of Menelik's soldiers; while it is unclear what language they speak to each other, it is clear that the Oromo farmers cannot speak Amharic. On two occasions the local Oromo farmers seek revenge against their Amhara neighbours and the government intervenes: in the first instance, in the 1970s during the Derg era, the official sent to pacify Burqa refuses to speak Afan Oromo. In the second instance, during the transitional period after the fall of the Derg, Hayelom is sent to mediate, and his willingness to use a translator is a sign of the positive changes under the new Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime and his recognition for multilingual reality.

Moreover, in the two novels, the same multilingual local holds different meanings for different language speakers, which are differently located in linguistic and ideological terms. For example, Naqamte, in western Ethiopia, is a multilingual area because the local spoken language is Afan Oromo, but Amharic is the official state language. In *Yoomi Laataa?*, Fiqir, Getaw's daughter who has married an Oromo nationalist and Oromo Liberation Front fighter, Sandaba, is welcome though initially she speaks only

Amharic. Her willingness to learn Afan Oromo is itself a sign that she does not share the arrogance of the Amhara ruling elite. It is also in Naqamte that Hawani of *Yeburqa Zimita* speaks at a conference aimed at explaining EPRDF policies (including multilingualism) to the local population, who declare that they do not want to be forced to learn Tigrinya like they were earlier forced to learn Amharic. Hawani decides to speak in Afan Oromo in order to show the willingness of the EPRDF government to meet their aspirations. These points further discussed in Chapter 3.

In the village novels, *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, multilingual locals are very limited in scope and confined to specific villages, but still, they are significant in number. As I show in Chapter 3, these places are where multilingual practices take place so that viewing space in this way can help us open up the multilingual rich in Ethiopia that never be noticed in traditional monolingual reading.

As already mentioned, spatiality is important in the novels also to question the traditional Amharic focus on the Highlands, from which the rest of country appears as a horizon of conquest. By contrast, as already shown, the four novels in this thesis shift and broaden the 'significant geographies' of Ethiopian literature.[27] I use the expression 'narrative significant geographies' to discuss the geographies within the narrative space of the novels that matter to their authors, narrators and characters, and the political implications they may have.[28]

---

[27] For Orsini, Laachir and Marzagora, 'significant geographies' are 'the wider conceptual, imaginative and real geographies that texts, authors and language communities inhabit, produce and reach out to' (2018a:5). The advantage of thinking through significant geographies, they argue, is that it makes us consider local and distant geographies – whether imaginative or real, networks or horizons – and their interrelationship in ways that: (1) foreground the literary in its various definitions; (2) make us think about actual trajectories and specific uses of spatial concepts/images, and so geographies that are significant rather than generic meta-categories such as 'world', 'global'; (3) highlight multiplicity, openness and disjuncture, and discourage easy technologies of recognition and complacent distant gazes ' (Ibid.).

[28] For Orsini, Laachir and Marzagora (2018b), the analysis of significant geographies 'within the text' includes 'geographies within the text, both objective (for lack of a better term) geographies (setting,

By introducing the critical concepts of MULOSIGE into the domain of narratological studies, this study extends and diversifies the thematic scope of MULOSIGE beyond its original focus on literary history. In so doing, the study proves the MULOSIGE approach and critical concepts are flexible and productive enough in studying multilingual reality and practices outside the study of literary history. For example, the MULOSIGE conception of the spatial imagination is important in reading the engagement of the novel with contentious historical narratives (Ch.1 and 2).

0.2.2 Contextual narratology

…the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract 'formal' approach and an equally abstract 'ideological' approach. Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon – social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981:259)

In order to connect the analysis of fictional texts in a literary and political context as conflicted as that of Ethiopia—particularly when it comes to the Oromo and the Amhara—without losing sight of the mediations of genre, narrative choices, etc., I have specifically turned to contextual narratology.[29] Narratology, the scientific study of narratives, was introduced into literary studies by Tzvetan Todorov, and in its early form it focused on pure narrative structural analysis (Alber and Fludernik 2010; Bal 2009; Darby 2001, 2003; Fludernik 1996, 2000; Herman 2002, 2003; Prince 2014; Titzmann

---

narrator's descriptions, characters moving in space), subjective geographies (character's worldviews), and the implicit geographies (terms, 'traces' of other locals in the narration, for example traces of other languages, hints to different traditions' (Ibid. p. 303,304).

[29] Scholars have suggested various terms to move away from or complement 'pure' narratology, such as 'contextualist narratology'(Chatman 1990; Shen 2005; Smith 1981), 'cultural narratology' (Helms 1996, 2003), 'applied cultural narratology' (Nünning 2009) and 'feminist narratology' (Lanser 1986, 1992). Lanser, for example, critiques classical narratology for its 'adherence to supposedly value-free methodology; and most critically, an isolation of texts from extraliterary contexts and from their ideological base' (1992:39).

2003; Todorov 1969). Mary Louse Pratt (1977, 1986), whose works greatly contributed to the development of contextual narratology clearly states the problem of classical narratology. But, Pratt (1977:115) argues that, classical narratology failed to take into account that 'from being autonomous self-contained, self-motivating, context-free objects which exist independently from the 'pragmatic 'concerns of 'every day' discourse, literary works take place in a context, and like any other utterance they cannot be described apart from the context'. Or, to put it with Nünning (2003:364), classical structuralist narratological analysis overlooked three key aspects: 'context, cultural history and interpretation'.

How does context impact narratives? First, narrative discourse is 'not necessarily—or even usually—marked off or segregated from other discourse', as Smith puts it (1980: 228). Whether as an orchestrated confluence of discourses (Bakhtin 1984) or as sharing narrative elements with historical writing (White 1973), novelistic discourse is best viewed in dialogue, or in a continuum with, non-novelistic discourses. This is why I emphasise, in Chapter 2, the historical discourse in Bahru Zawde's (2003) History of Ethiopia and its importance for, and overlap with, historical fiction in Amharic. In fact, as Bakhtin already noted (see next section), narrative fictions have the power 'to represent a medley of voices engaged in a conversation and/or a struggle for cultural spaces' (Scholes 1998:134, quoted in Nünning 2004:358). The choice of highly polyphonic novels in order to challenge dominant cultural discourses calls for narratological tools to describe and analyse them. As already mentioned, focalization, strategies of speech representation, characterization, setting and so on are strategies that historical novels employ to actively engage with and complicate the dominant political discourse of the Great Tradition. As Helms (2003:7) argues, 'narrative techniques are not neutral and transparent forms to be filled with content, and … dialogic relations in narrative structures are ideologically informed.'

A second, related, point to make is that novels do not so much reflect but reflect *on* and intervene in cultural debates. My contextual and multilingual approach shares Bender's conception of novels as 'primary historical and ideological documents; vehicles, not the reflections, of social change' (Bender 1987:xv). For Bender (1987), narrative texts 'can play in the process of forming institutions and shaping mentalities', and 'literature and visual arts as an advanced form of knowledge, as cognitive instruments that anticipate and contribute to institutional formation' (Ibid.). In this respect, the emphasis on multilingualism and the recuperation of historical memory are significant interventions by novels like *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Yeburqa Zimita,* while *Evangadi* intervenes, less polemically, in the debate on what constitutes Ethiopia.

At the same time, contextual narratology reminds us that narratives are not only internally potentially polyvocal, but that meanings are defined by their social uses (Friedman 1989), and their users, the readers. As we shall see, the revisionist attitude toward the Ethiopian Great Tradition that is commonplace in Oromo discourse and for the readers of *Yoomi Laataa?* is highly contested by Amharic readers, as the controversy around *Yeburqa Zimita* shows (See Ch. 1). As a result, contextual narratology produces 'thicker descriptions' (Nünning 2004:359) than those offered by classical narratological analysis, in that the description of thematic and formal features of texts are linked to the narrative representation and articulation of epistemological, ethical, and social problems. Throughout Chapters 1 to 4, I have presented several examples of thick descriptions where I described both the content and form of the selected topics in the novels.

In short, this study consists of a narratological analysis based on contextualist narratology that takes into account the content (selected themes), narrative elements such as focalization, and context (social, historical and political) in the analysis of the novels. Since focalization is so important to my analysis, let me clarify my use of the term. Manfred Jahn (2007) and many other narratologists distinguish between

‘narration’ and ‘focalization’. According to Jahn (2007), ‘*[n]arration* is the telling of a story in a way that simultaneously respects the needs and enlists the co-operation of its audience; *focalization* is the submission of (potentially limitless) narrative information to a perspectival filter’ (p.94, emphasis is original). For Rimmon-Kenan (1983:71), ‘[t]he story is presented in the text through the mediation of some ‘prism’, ‘perspective’, ‘angle of vision’, verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his’, and this ‘prism’ is called focalization. These two narrative activities are undertaken by two different narrative agents: the narrator and focalizer. For Jahn (2007), ‘the narrator is the functional agent who verbalizes the story’s nonverbal matter, edits the verbal matter, manages the exposition, decides what is to be told in what sequence, and establishes communication with the addressee’ (p.96). Genette identified multiple narrators in the narrative texts: extradiegetic, intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrators based on the position of the narrator to the story world. According to Fludernik (2009), ‘[h]omodiegetic narrators are located on the extradiegetic level but are also characters in the story. Intradiegetic narrators are part of the fictional world: the text reproduces the situation of the conversational narrator at the story level. Heterodiegetic narrators that foreground their role as narrator function as the producer of the narrative text’ (p.158). Focalizers ‘are those entities, who do not tell any story, but ‘perceive’ (Genette). According to Jahn (2007), ’the general consensus today is that no reflector ever literally *tells* the narrative we are reading’ (p.97, emphasis is original). He or she is ‘the person from whose perspective focalization is carried out’ (Fludernik 2009:153). This person could be a character, a narrator and to some extent also the author (Rimmon-Kenan 2003). According to the ‘position relative to the story’ and the ‘degree of persistence’ of focalization across the text and (Rimmon-Kenan), we may have multiple focalizers and focalizations, especially in dialogic and polyphonic novels. On the other hand, from the perspective of the focalizer’s position in relation to the story, a focalizer can be external (narrator-focalizer) or internal (character-focalizer) focalizers (Fludernik 2009:153).

According to Jahn (2007), '[i]n the mode of *internal focalization,* […] narrative information is restricted to data available to [characters'] perception, cognition, and thought' (p.98). The external focalizer 'describes a view on the characters and the fictional world from the outside, whereas protagonists' inner lives remain a mystery to us' (Ibid.). In my study, I emphasize the importance of changes of focalizers and of the difference between internal and external focalization in the novels, as ways of validating alternative perspectives and historical narratives, but also to emphasize the qualitative difference between internal and external focalization when it comes to 'other' groups.

Two other narratological terms require clarification: character and characterization. According to Suzanne Keen (2003:57), characters are 'anthropomorphic entities who carry out the plot actions of narratives, [and they] strongly resemble real people (or plausible people in fantastic situations)'. Characters are not only the concern for authors, who create them for their different narrative purposes, but also they are narrative constructs that dearly considered by the readers. Keen (Ibid.) adds that '[n]ormally, readers create fictional characters in their minds by assembling the textual details relayed by the narrator into patterns that seem like people. Thus, fictional characters (and not only those in realistic texts) invite comparison with the real people of a reader's experience.' The related term of characterization refers to the textual representation of characters. According to Rimmon-Kenan (2003:59), characterization is 'a network of character-traits' or 'character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum' through which characters are textually represented either directly or indirectly. It is a text level narratological technique that used to represent real and fictional people and actions of those people. In this thesis, some textual characterization like naming of characters, and reflection on their ethnic affiliation and their political ideology help us discuss the representation of multilingual realities and multiplicity of

perspectives that intended to challenge totalizing of views and domination though they still have other narrative relevance.

One last point I would like to mention here is that the contextualist narratology that I have presented above is helpful to understand narrative texts within their own linguistic context. However, this narrative model does not help us understand intertextual dialogue or echoes among the multiple perspectives presented by different novels. To mention just an example, the two historical novels follow the similar revisionist approach in their representation of the historical narratives though still from different positions. In order to overcome this limitation of contextualist narratology, I draw on Bakhtin's theory of the novel.

0.2.3 Heteroglossia and dialogism

Life is dialogical by its very nature. To live means to engage in dialogue, to question, to listen, to answer, to agree (Bakhtin 1984a:292).

The third conceptual framework that my contextual and multilingual approach relies on is Bakhtin's dialogism and heteroglossia as part of his theory of the novel.[30] Given the strong monolingual and monocultural nationalist discourse, the fact that all the novels I discuss are, in each their own way, heteroglossic and polyphonic, is one of their most striking characteristics. In *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin conceptualizes the novel as 'a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized' (Bakhtin 1984a:141)— a 'microcosm of heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 1981:411).[31] If any (national) language is, for

[30] Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) is a Russian critic and literary scholar, who diverged from the Russian Formalist Circle both in his understanding of language and of the novelistic discourse, the point I turn to in detail later. His influence has extended far beyond the scope of literary studies to cultural studies, religious studies, historical analysis and so on. He is known for the concepts such as 'heteroglossia', 'dialogism', 'polyphony', and 'carnivalesque' which he used in his studies (Bakhtin 1984)of the novels by Dostoevsky and Rabelais.

[31] In Bakhtin's (1984:112) definition, the novelistic form is 'many-voiced or, more precisely, is defined as the artistic orchestration of a diversity of social discourses: the novel form is fundamentally heteroglot,

Bakhtin, stratified into 'social dialects, … professional jargons, languages of generations and age groups, … languages of the authorities, … and languages that serve the specific socio-political purpose of the day' (1981:262-3), language in the novel embodies a 'world view' and is an 'ideologically saturated' element (1984:74). Even a single word 'is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents (Bakhtin 1981:276). This understanding of language diverges substantially from the formalist definition of language as an abstract system of signs. For example, in *Yoomi Laataa?*, the term the Amhara landlord use for Afan Oromo language, '*Afaan Qottuu'*, encapsulates a whole history of domination.[32] The Oromo songs introduced in *Yeburqa Zimita* carry a historical memory that has been repressed by state nationalism.

Heteroglossia, Helms glosses, enters the novel, first, 'as a means of internal orchestration in the form of subjects and their languages' (see Ch.3), and second, as 'dialogizing background' (Helms 2003:22) (see Chs.1,2 & 4), in which even authorial consciousness 'is brought on to the same plane as that of the heroes and interacts with them dialogically as autonomous subjects and not as objectified images' held within the authorial vision. In this context, polyphony is different from heteroglossia as the former suggests an orchestration of different voices, the latter capitalizes on linguistic diversity or multilingualism.

Dialogism is, then, the other key word together with heteroglossia. Unlike the early novel in which 'the characters' voices, viewpoints, philosophies and the diversity of their social worlds are all objects of an encompassing authorial knowledge, and thus subordinated to that unified, monologic artistic design' (Bakhtin 1984:88)—an Amharic example would be Afewerk's novel, *Yelibb Welled Tarik* (1908)—, the dialogic novel is

---

many-language'. For further discussion on the novel, refer Cornils and Schernus (2003), Dawson (2018), MacKay (2010) and Moretti (1998).

[32] As Helms (2003:22) also puts it, 'languages, even single words, are specific views of the world, ways of conceptualizing the world in words.'

characterized by the multiplicity of voices and their interaction among the characters (Bakhtin 1981; Habib 2005; Kim 1999; Morson and Emerson 1990; Steinby and Tintti 2013; Todorov 1984; Vice 1997;Patterson 1985). According to Bakhtin (1984a:40), '*The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*. Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally' (emphasis is original). Such dialogism, for Bakhtin, extends much beyond formal dialogue; it permeates all human speech and relationships and 'everything that has meaning and significance' (Ibid.).

Dialogism is particularly important in the novels I examine at various levels. At the most obvious level, particularly the historical novels discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 are dialogic in that characters embody and voice contrasting ideological positions, whether they engage in actual debate or not (e.g., Wariyo and Getaw in Ch. 2, or Hawani's speech discussed in Ch. 1). At times, the impossibility of dialogue, if characters do not know each other's language (as in *Yoomi Laataa?*) or do not want to listen to each other (*Yeburqa Zimita*) is emphasised. At another level, nuggets of nationalist ideology—like the song in *Yeburqa Zimita*—are dialogized and 'double-voiced' (Vice 1997) in that they are presented both as examples of a hegemonic ideology and subjected to critique. Third, the presence of fragments of orature, or speech in languages other than the one the novel is written dialogises language itself and signals the active presence of other languages inside and outside the text. At times, such multilingual heteroglossia signals a clear asymmetry of power (Oromo songs in *Yeburqa Zimita*); at other times it marks the willingness to come together for a common cause (the meeting of fighters in Khartoum in *Yoomi Laataa?*).

To what extent different languages enter the multilingual novel 'as world views' is one of the guiding questions of my thesis. The first condition is dialogic relations 'toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is

perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else's voice' (Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov 1994:104). For example, an Oromo song of displacement in *Yeburqa Zimita* that is remembered by Hawani though presented by the narrator reflects the voice of the Oromo farmers who were evicted from their land by the Menelik's force in the early 20th century, but they are not present in the novel.

Second, dialogism, as presented in Chapter 3, can be found 'between language styles, social dialects, and so forth, insofar as they are perceived as semantic positions, as language worldviews of a sort, that is, as something no longer strictly within the realm of linguistic investigation' (Bakhtin *et al*. 1994:104). Third, it can be found between the author and '[his] own utterance as a whole, toward its separate parts and toward an individual word within it' (ibid). This would be possible if the author is able to keep his distance from them. A song of national pledge in *Yoomi Laataa*? can be one example of such form of dialogism in which we note the author distances himself by directly quoting the song in the original language it is sung, Amharic. Even he has shown the difference between the characters, the Derg national defence force, who sing the song, the narrator, who criticises the content of the song against the political context in which the song was produced.

The last condition, but very important for dialogic study is in the speech phenomena where the author directly borrows the discourse of someone else. These can be presented under two categories of the instances of dialogic interactions that the dialogic novels usually present and these instances are noted in the novels under study. First, when' [the author's thought] having penetrated someone else's discourse and made its home in it, does not collide with the other's thought, but rather follows after it in the same direction, merely making that direction conventional' (Bakhtin et al. 1994:106)

This condition is called ‘stylization’. For example, Wariyo’s argument with the Amhara landlord, Getaw, where the former tells the later the Oromo civilization that they have their own way of life in all aspects of their livelihood and indigenous administration before the coming of the Amhara, who claim civilizing the Oromo as mentioned by Getaw. Wariyo’s views echo with that of the Oromo nationalists including the author, Isayas.

Second, unlike the earlier condition, the author’s discourse is presented as ‘a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims’ (Bakhtin et al., 1994:106). In Bakhtin’s words, this is called ‘parody’. In *Yeburqa Zimita*, a speech by an Amhara man, Asnaqe, who arrogantly claims that the Amhara are the sole founder and owner of the Ethiopian civilization so that their emperors never be blamed for any past faults and crimes they had committed. This idea contradicts with the author’s beliefs who is noted for the equality of all the nations in the country. In each of this speech phenomena we find ‘discourse in them has a twofold direction—it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward another's discourse, toward someone else's speech’ (ibid). I turn to each of these points throughout my discussion in the core chapters.

For Bakhtin, the heteroglossic and polyphonic aspects of the dialogic novel are ‘centrifugal’ because they usually oppose any centralising (‘centripetal’) or homogenizing force, like the authorial voice (Bakhtin 1981:272). The novels in my study, with their polyphonic narratives that incorporate marginalized voices and genres of orature, contest the narratives of assimilation and homogenization, as well as monolingualism, literary monologism, and the teleological history of the Great

Tradition, all of which characterize mainstream Ethiopian literary studies and can be considered centripetal forces.[33] As such, particularly the two historical novels may be characterized as resistance literature, literature that, according to Barbara Harlow (1987:28), 'calls attention to itself, and to literature in general, as a political and politicised activity'.[34] Harlow shares Bakhtin's idea of dialogism that the narratives in novels reflect strong resistance to any dominating force, and the historical novels are a good example. The two historical novels we read in this thesis reveal to us the ideology behind Ethiopian language policies and the repressive reaction to multilingual realities and they also provide us with the strategies for resisting the repressive ideology.

Accordingly, literary resistance, in this study, is seen as a form of 'cultural resistance' in the way Laachir and Talajooy (2012) use the term. According to them, the concept of cultural resistance is used 'to describe the way novels, films, plays and music are used to resist the dominant social, economic, political and cultural discourses and structures either consciously or unconsciously.' 'This', they argue, 'can be achieved both through the choice of topics, i.e., thematically (breaking of taboos, and creating new ways of seeing the past, present, and future), and through the developing of new patterns and forms of resistance that defy borderlines by using new forms of language, music, plots and characters' (p.15). In conclusion, Bakhtin's two notions of dialogism and heteroglossia, then, along with those of multilingual local and significant geographies,

---

[33] As Allen (2000:21) puts it, 'If the dialogic aspect of language foregrounds class, ideological and other conflicts, divisions and hierarchies within society, the society, manifested in state power and those elements of society which serve state power, will frequently attempt to put the lid on such aspects.'

[34] Harlow (1987), who has studied resistance literature, argues that narrative as a genre has the potential to show us the historical situation in which it is produced and also plays a subversive role of the domination discourse. In Harlow's own words: 'Narrative, unlike poetry perhaps, provides a more developed historical analysis of the circumstances of economic, political, and cultural domination and repression and through that analysis raises a systematic and concerted challenge to the imposed chronology of what Frederic Jameson has called 'master narratives,' ideological paradigms which contain within their plots a predetermined ending' (p.78).

help me explore the relationships between different competing voices or narratives within each novel and across different novels.

0.3 The texts and chapterization

The four substantial chapters of this thesis test the contextual and multilingual approach in relation to four historical novels and village novels, two written in Afan Oromo and two in Amharic. They explore three core points of contestation (political history, language ideology and politics, and the relationship between oral tradition (orature) and literature) that make the basis for the arguments of the proponents of the Great Tradition and the counter-hegemonic ethno-nationalists. Positioned in different linguistic and literary traditions, the novels rework and reinterpret the historical narratives, promoting linguistic diversity, and foregrounding the interface between orature and literature so that the dichotomies are blurred. Accordingly, Chapters 1 and 2 present how the selected historical novels use narrative techniques, textual strategies and thematic selection in foregrounding the counter-hegemonic narratives and contesting the history of the Great Tradition, however, the novels use the strategies towards different ends due to the positionality of the novels in different traditions. Chapters 3 and 4 respectively focus on language ideology and its politics in relation to ground-level plurilingual practices (Ch. 3), and the place given to orature in the chirographic world (Ch. 4). These are the two resistance strategies used by the novels in their contestation of the Great Tradition. Since a contextual and multilingual approach takes the extratextual factors into account during the analysis, I end this introduction by presenting the novels and their authors in relation to their relevant contexts.

First, *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* contest the Amhara-centred Ethiopianist metanarratives by zooming in and (re)storying the experiences and voices of different ethnic groups in the country. I argue that even though both novels employ similar resistance strategies through the same narrative strategies, they use these strategies

towards different ends or for different purposes. For example, *Yeburqa Zimita* presents the Oromo historical concerns within the context of a conflict within a specific local in the form of collective memory that articulated by the community leaders narrating what they have witnessed in their life and through different genres of orature, folk narratives and folk songs. In contrast, *Yoomi Laataa?* presents multiple historical events over wide historical periods and the novel complicates each scene by presenting the characters who reflect diverging views about the historical and political themes or events.

The author of *Yeburqa Zimita,* Tesfaye Gebreab is more controversial than any Amharic contemporary writers.[35] The main reason for this, in my understanding, is his engagement with contested historical themes and identity politics that marred the late 20th century Ethiopia. Tesfaye was born in a small town called Bishoftu in central Oromia region of Ethiopia. This town, though largely populated and surrounded by the Oromo community, is a hub of different ethnic groups who came to the central Ethiopia from different corners of the country. Above all, the town is close to the capital, Addis Ababa and only 41 kilometres afar to the south and one of the tourist attractions in the central Ethiopia. Since the time of Haile Selassie, Eritreans were one of the major inhabitants of Bishoftu. Tesfaye was born from this Eritrean community. Interactions between the inhabitants of the town and the surrounding Oromo community were good, and this is reflected in Tesfaye's works. Tesfaye got the opportunity to become familiar with the surrounding Oromo culture, and central as well as western Oromia are the significant geographies of his novel. These significant geographies are multilingual locals in their own. As he mentioned in several interviews, Tesfaye used to travel among different Oromo communities in the central Ethiopia when he worked as

---

[35] Tesfaye is given special place among the Oromo due to his commitment to the Oromo nationalism, particularly through his book, *Yeburqa Zimita*, while he is still Eritrean. A short reflection by Hunde Dhugassa (2012) highlights this reality among the Oromo.

a journalist for the EPRDF, until he was forced to leave the country following the publication of his creative works, mainly *Yeburqa Zimita*.

As his autobiographical and historical fictional writings show, Tesfaye is a proponent of ethno-nationalist politics who vehemently opposes Amhara cultural and political hegemony. In his works, he focuses on the Tigrayans, Eritreans, Oromos and other Ethiopian peoples. However, most of his works have been criticised by Amhara elites for their representation of the Oromo cause, as for example with *Yeburqa Zimita*. One example is Demeke Tassew's (2014) PhD thesis, which singles out one Oromo-related story from *Yeburqa Zimita* to argue that the narrator in unreliable and this makes the story about the Oromo unreliable and politically motivated. After Amhara nationalists have denounced Tesfaye's literary engagement with Oromo politics and characterized him as a mercenary who works to pit the Oromo against the Amhara thereby to dismantle Ethiopia by relating this to his Eritrean identity, Tesfaye has become closer to the Oromo than ever. As he witnessed at the Oromo Studies Association Conference in 2014 in Washington DC, he took on an Oromo name, Gadaa, in order to show his solidarity with the Oromo in their fight against the Amhara cultural and political hegemony. As I show in Chapter 1, *Yeburqa Zimita* has become a concern of Ethiopian politics not only of academia.

Yeburqa Zimita was published in 2000, almost a decade after Ethiopia adopted ethno-linguistic federalism under the domination of the TPLF. Though the TPLF superficially seemed to tolerate works that explore the political discourse, it exerted a systematic censorship to arrest and eliminate any dissident writer. Some texts, particularly works by the Oromo nationalist writers, were banned under their administration; many Oromo writers were forced to leave the country and others, who were unable to escape,

were heinously murdered.[36] Things have been complex and puzzling with *Yeburqa Zimita:* the author was forced by the TPLF officials to live in exile and yet Amhara elites accuse him to have been sponsored by the same TPLF officials (Tesfaye 2018).[37]

The novel presents three major themes that related to the Ethiopian Civil War of the Derg era (1974-1991) and its aftermaths. First, the most popular in this novel that received a wider political attention is the story about the conflicts between the Oromo and the Amhara in a village called Burqa in the central Ethiopia. Second, and the story of the TPLF's struggle against the Derg government. This story begins in the prologue and ends in the epilogue while it is still given a great deal of space in the main chapters. Third, the history of the Eritrean struggle for its independence from the Ethiopian dictatorship. This makes the main plots of the novel and I explain further each plot in Chapter 1.

The striking point in this novel is the presence of Oromo language, an uncommon practice in the Amharic novelistic tradition. It begins with the title of the novel, which is adapted from an Afan Oromo word, *Burqaa*. It is a toponym for a river and small village place where a conflict between the Oromo and Amhara erupts so that it is important metaphor that form the Amhara-Oromo episode. *Yeburqa Zimita* is the first in Amharic literary tradition to use the Oromo word as part of its title. Other than this, there are a great deal of Afan Oromo expressions, songs and poetry in this novel. As a result of this, the novel is found different from the mainstream Amharic novels and Amharic historical novels as I show in Chapter 1. This makes *Yeburqa Zimita* appropriate for this study than any other Amharic novels that I have known so far.

---

[36] Teferi Nigussie, my former teacher arrested several times for his critique and his book shop in Addis Ababa, that eventually closed for selling his and other Afan Oromo books. Isayas also told me that he feared for his life and stopped continuing to write historical fiction after the publication of *Yoomi Laataa?*

[37] April 2019. 'Qeeqa Obbo Addisuu fi deebii Tasfaayee Gabra'aab.' *BBC News Afaan Oromoo*. Retrieved 15 September 2021, from https://www.bbc.com/afaanoromoo/oduu-48010824.

The Oromo novel that presents a similar case is *Yoomi Laataa*? It was written by Isayas Hordofa, who was born in Naqamte Town from an Oromo speaking family in the western part Oromia region. He attended school in Naqamte and joined Asmara College before he continued his further education at Alemaya College of Agriculture (currently Haramaya University) in Ethiopia. After he taught at elementary schools in Naqamte for a few years, he worked as a journalist for Afan Oromo program in the Ethiopian Radio and Television Service during the Derg regime, both in Wallaga and Hararge. He began writing while he was still a journalist, and his works used to be broadcast through the Ethiopian Radio Afan Oromo Program. As his novels show, Isayas vehemently opposes the assimilationist Ethiopianist narratives. He advocates for ethnic rights such as getting service in one's own language and promoting culture and history. His protagonists, mainly in *Yoomi Laataa?*, represent these views of him as I show in Chapter 2.

Yoomi Laataa? is the first and so far only historical novel in Afan Oromo. The novel consists of sixteen chapters which can be divided into three groups according to the historical periods addressed. The first three chapters present the history of violent empire formation undertaken by the Amhara kings (Tewodros and Menelik) until the empire finally became the modern state of Ethiopia. This story makes up the background for the whole narrative presented in the subsequent chapters of the novel. The main plot is initiated by the conflict between an Oromo man, Yadanno Jarra and his Amhara master, Gizachew, in the village of Harawe in the Hararge region, the eastern part of Ethiopia. The main cause of the conflict is that Yadanno discovers Gizachew sleeping with his wife, Sintolinna and beheads him. Both Sintolinna and Yadanno run away, but in different directions, and the novel presents the ordeals both Sintolinna and her family are subjected to under the Haile Selassie and Derg regimes. This makes the second part of the novel which encompasses Chapters 4 to 15, and the chapters also present different historical themes. Lastly, Chapter 16, which constitutes part three of

the novel, presents the last moments of the Derg government and the re-union of Sintolinna's family. Throughout the novel, the Ethiopian history of three regimes - the reign of Menelik II (r. 1886-1913) and Haile Selassie I (r.1930-1974) and the rule of Mengistu Hailemariam (r.1974-1991) - are intertwined with this family history and represented through the dialogues and conversations among the characters.

Tesfaye Gebreab and Isayas Hordofa were both journalists and did not study literature at schools. Their experience of working entirely with the real world and their familiarity with reportage writing have impacted overall structure and the narrative techniques of their novels. Both of them have stated that their decision to write these novels emanated neither from mere curiosity to write fiction nor from the desire to fictionalize history; rather, their primary concern was to rewrite history and the novel is, for them, a writing strategy that aimed at social emancipation. The authors used the novel genre to capture/ reflect on the social reality of Ethiopian society through the exploration of historical accounts, retelling of historical events so as they both overcome the distortion, they noted in the Ethiopian state historiography. Above all, both authors are from the peripheralized social domains either ethnically or politically, so that they represent the voices in and from the margins of mainstream Ethiopian literary tradition.

The historical novels I use in this study share the characteristics of what Linda Hutcheon (2004) termed as 'historiographic metafiction' as they are 'intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (p.5). Particularly, the two novels reflect what Nünning (2004) designated as 'revisionist historical novels', because

> [t]hey have increasingly incorporated those thematic domains dealt with by the history of mentalities, women's history, oral history, history from below, and the history of everyday life […]. Revisionist historical novels are inspired by the wish to rewrite history, particularly from the point of view of those all too long ignored by traditional historiography, and to offer alternative histories. They often do so by relying heavily on multiple internal focalization, adopting the points of view of several character-focalizers whose limited perspectives project highly subjective

> views of history. These narrative strategies are not an end in themselves but rather serve as a means to challenge both hegemonic historiographic discourses and the generic conventions of the realist historical novel. (p.362)

Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis present two other points of contention, which cut across the four novels, so that in each chapter all the four novels are discussed. One is language ideology and its politics (Ch. 3), and the other is the place of orature in literary studies texts (Ch. 4). *Evangadi* is the second Amharic novel selected for this study. The novel was written by Fiqremarqos Desta, who was born in Bahir Dar, the capital for the Amhara region, and is a native Amharic speaker. To my knowledge, Fiqremarqos is the first Amhara ethnic author to write on non-Amhara people without negatively portraying them. Fiqremarqos was a chemistry teacher before he shifted to creative writing. In an interview, he had with a local television channel, *Maleda Tv* (2018), he explained that the representation of the Ethiopian multiculturalism is not fair and mainstream Ethiopian literary studies is partial in its engagement. Therefore, he is interested in one of the neglected areas and peoples in the south-western Ethiopia. Though his works address several peoples that live in this pocket of the country, he is highly interested in the Hamar people, a Cushitic speaking minority ethnic group in Ethiopia.

What makes him different from other ethno-nationalist writers such as Tesfaye Gebreab is that he never presents Ethiopia's internal colonialism. In other words, for him, the problems (lack of infrastructure and background) he observed in the Hamar and the marginalization in Ethiopia is not ethnically based, but it is a weakness in the Ethiopian political system. He differs from mainstream Ethiopianists in the thematic and spatial scope that moves beyond that of Amharic canonical novels. Moreover, he shows a favourable attitude towards the multilingual and multicultural practices in Ethiopia, as reflected in his novels and films. I selected his *Evangadi* for the analysis because, first, it presents a wider spatial scope beyond the northern part of the country, and secondly it

foregrounds linguistic and ethnic diversity in Ethiopia. Lastly, like *Yeburqa Zimita,* its title is an uncommon trend in Amharic literary tradition as it is named after an influential oral performative imaginative culture of the Hamar, *evangadi*. In short, it explores the world outside mainstream Ethiopian literary studies no matter how it refrains itself from openly challenging the Ethiopianist view.

Fiqremarqos has written six novels, and *Evangadi* is the second of a trilogy on the Hamar. It was first published in 1998 like *Yeburqa Zimita* after the country adopted ethno-linguistic federalism. Unlike its predecessor, *Kebuska Bestejerba* (*Behind the Buska)* (1995),[38] the novel does not concern one community alone but rather the interactions among the people who live in different villages adjacent to each other in the southwestern Ethiopia around the Omo River. The novel presents the stories of the Ethiopian emigrants, Lokaye and Sora, who leave their country for different reasons, but come back home and the challenges they face in re-discovering themselves. It also tells the stories of the western ethnographer, Karlet Alfred, who travels and lives among the indigenous people in the southwestern Ethiopia predominantly for academic purpose. In narrating these stories, *Evangadi* reflects on how multilingual reality and practices are understood by the characters with different linguistic backgrounds and different communities. For example, for some characters, speaking a certain language other than ones mother tongue is an opportunity to travel without linguistic restriction, and not a threat for the unity. As this region of the country is out of the interest of the state, both for economic and political purpose (Clapham 2011), the multilingual experience in this area is not politically motivated. Therefore, the novel encourages multilingualism and multiculturalism so that it proves that these cultural practices are not a threat to the Ethiopian unity as most mainstream scholars usually think. In so

doing, *Evangadi* resists cultural and linguistic homogenization. For this reason, like other novels in this study, *Evangadi* is treated as a resistance novel.

The last novel to be considered for this study is *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, a village novel in Afan Oromo written by Dhaba Wayessa. Dhaba was born in Wallaga to an Afan Oromo speaking family. He moved to the US, where he earned a BA and an MFA in film studies. Before he moved to the US, he used to write short stories and plays. His stories were broadcast on the Ethiopian Radio Service Afan Oromo program, and his plays were shown at the Ethiopian national cinema houses during the Derg regime like that of other Oromo writers such as Isayas Hordofa. Like Isayas, Dhaba is considered a pioneer of Oromo literature and has been a role model and source of inspiration for other Oromo writers although he has published only two novels, a few short stories and short plays, but all are very popular and influential. His novels are used as textbooks in high schools, colleges and universities in Ethiopia where Afan Oromo is taught.

Gurraacha Abbayaa is his second novel, and it was first published in 1996. It is set in the Gumuz land in western Ethiopia. The novel is about a conflict between an Amhara man, Gebru Tefera and a Gumuz man, Bacangire Bakalo, and the consequences and social crises that follow. The conflict continues until both Gebru and Bacangire are killed, and finally concluded when the Gebru relatives cooperate and destroy a whole Gumuz village and exterminate all people and animals in that village. The destruction leaves only two survivors, Bacangire's teenagers, Doca and Teto. The majority of the novel is devoted to the cultural violations committed by Teto and the consequences he faces in another Gumuz village where he is migrated to. Teto's mistake and lack of respect for the Gumuz culture have become a cause for his own death at the hand of another Gumuz man, for the suicide his sister and Yenchen who throw themselves into the Abbaya river. The novel concludes with the tragic death of all the main protagonists.

Unlike other Oromo novels, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* focuses entirely on the non-Oromo ethnic groups. In doing so, the novel expands the spatial imagination and thematic horizon of Afan Oromo novels. Like *Evangadi* does to the Amharic literary tradition, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* goes beyond the Oromo-centred narratives, thematically and spatially. In this respect, the novel challenges the Oromo-centred narratives as it resists, for example, the monolingual use of Oromo language by inflecting it with rich traces of Gumuz language. As I show later, the implication is far reaching. As far as *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* are concerned, it is uncommon both in Afan Oromo and Amharic literature for such emphasis to be placed on minority ethnic groups. The novels present significant traces of languages of the peoples they present and show their support for multilingual practices through different narrative strategies. Though they use similar textual and narrative strategies, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* presents more multilingual evidence than *Evangadi,* but *Evangadi* explicitly discusses how multilingualism is important in strengthening peaceful co-existence among the speakers of different languages.

In Chapter 3, the four novels are read in relation to plurilingual or multilingual practices in Ethiopia both within the historical context and village life. The chapter presents the fictional representation of linguistic diversity in the country and its implication for multilingualizing Ethiopian literary practice. It concludes with my argument for literary multilingualism as a form of resistance that individual authors employ to counter literary and linguistic monolingualism as well as multilingualism as a reflection of the historical and social reality. Village novels were introduced to Ethiopian literary studies by the authors of these novels, Fiqremarqos Desta and Dhaba Wayessa. These new literary practices present a different understanding of Ethiopia from the one presented in state historiography. Overall, then, the novels have been selected because their approaches to linguistic and literary homogenization differ from most Amharic novels which sustain and uphold cultural homogenization.

Before I conclude this section, let me add some discussion of the reception and readership of these novels within and outside Ethiopia, given that contestation at the national level is crucial to these novels and to this study. In the context of the Ethiopian literary tradition, it is frustratingly difficult to find data about the reception and readership of literary texts. The situation is even more dismal for literary texts in politically marginalized languages like Afan Oromo due to the absence of appropriate platforms (including newspapers and websites) and responsible institutions to gather and compile such data. As a result, I mostly rely on my personal observations and the views of other critics and a few readers.

All four novels have been well-received among Ethiopian readers within their respective linguistic and literary traditions except for *Yeburqa Zimita*, which caused a furore among Amharic and non-Amharic readers due to its engagement with Ethiopian political history.[39] As a result, the novel is understood differently by readers of Amharic and Afan Oromo. Some Oromo activists and political elites consider the novel to be emancipatory.[40] By contrast, Amharic readers, particularly Amhara elites and scholars, believe that the novel is a 'dangerous' text (see Ch.1 for further discussion). Without explicitly dividing between different ethnic groups (for example, between Amhara and

---

[39] Each novel has been reprinted at least once, some several times: *Yeburqa Zimita* was reprinted within one year of publication; *Evangadi* was reprinted twice within ten years of publication. *Yoomi Laataa?* was re-printed once within two years of publication, and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* has been reprinted several times in recent times. Given the low level of readership of literary texts in Ethiopia, such reprints are a good indication of the relative success of the novels.

[40] For example, Tolera (2013:np) relates that *Yeburqa Zimita* induced disputes between other Oromo prominent political elites who adored it and Amhara activists and elites who hated it: 'Just like Jawar [an Oromo prominent activist] whom they [the Amhara activists and elites] praised for his insightful political analysis and counted on to 'save Ethiopia' to only wish death for him in outrageous Oromophobia, they expelled Tesfaye just because he told the truth. For me, Tesfaye himself, through his writing, is a victim of Oromophobia.' Another reader, Tigist Geme, reflecting on an Oromo female character in Tesfaye's an *Immigrant's Memoir*, calls *Yeburqa Zimita* a 'well-received book' (https://www.gambellamedia.com/news/740-chaltu-as-helen-an-everyday-story-of-oromos-traumatic-identity-change). Tedla Asfaw (March 29,2009) presents favourable reflections on the novel (http://oromiatimes.blogspot.com/2009/03/ye-burka-zimita-comments-by-tedla-asfaw.html).

Oromo),Hunde Dhugassa presents three views about *Yeburqa Zimita:* the majority 'think [that Tesfaye] did what he have (sic) to do as a responsible author.' He mentions an Oromo reader, Aster Gemeda, who called *Yeburqa Zimita* 'the only Amharic novel she finished reading', and she recommended that Tesfaye be called 'Obbo Tesfaye', the Oromo equivalent of 'Sir Tesfaye'.[41] The second group believes that 'the book is correct in all aspect but fear the detailed revelation of the facts might hinder future and continued coexistence.' The third group, which Hunde designates 'a minority', thinks that Tesfaye 'is a destabilizing agent commissioned by these who don't like the Ethiopian unity'.[42] This group is not really a minority, I would argue, and its influence is palpable as it is supported by the mainstream scholars and prominent Amhara elites. In academia, *Yeburqa Zimita* has already attracted some attention, with two PhD theses devoted to it.[43] The novel also got media attention, for example, in 2019 the BBC Afan Oromo presented some reflections by the author about the novel and some of its major characters.[44]

Yoomi Laataa? was published by the Ethiopian Writers Association and has been popular among Oromo readers, who have praised it for its originality in creating Oromo identity and for its historical content, which is politically significant. Three endorsements on the back cover of the novel also highlight the historical importance of the novel and its original characterization. One is by Tesema Ta'a, a history professor at Addis Ababa University, and his comments highlight three points: first, the novel's historical authenticity, given that the novel reflects the author's personal experience and his first-hand information; second, the characterization is realistic and true to the life of the majority of the Oromos during the period; and thirdly, the superb 'language' and

---

[41] In fact, Tesfaye was given the Oromo name/title, Gadaa due to *Yeburqa Zimita*, as he mentioned on Washington DC conference (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4oze7r)

[42] (https://advocacy4oromia.org/tag/hunde-dhugassa/).

[43] Anteneh Aweke (2014) and Demeke Tasew (2014).

[44] https://www.bbc.com/afaanoromoo/oduu-48049096.

'historical knowledge' of the author.[45] The other endorsement is by Dr Muse Yaqob, for whom the novel is about the Oromo children's struggle for freedom and represents their historical heritage. The last endorsement is by Oromo journalist Temesgen Gamada, for whom the novel teaches what the Oromo identity (*oromummaa*) means and is highly recommendable for the new generation.[46] All endorsements are by Oromo intellectuals, and the fact that *Yoomi Laataa?* has become a topic in some Oromo PhD and MA degree programs underscores the truly historic importance of this novel in the Oromo literary field. The absence of critical engagement with the novel —even negative ones—from Amhara critics, despite the fact that it was published by the Ethiopian Writers' Association, testifies to the segmentation and asymmetry of the Ethiopian literary field.

Village novels are relatively a new genre in Ethiopian literature, but among the two authors, Fiqremarqos, *Evangadi*'s author, has received much more institutional and popular endorsement. Fiqremarqos is popular among Amharic readers and his works have been favorably received by mainstream Amhara readers like Zerihun Asfaw and Dereje Gebre of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.[47] As the novel's back cover testifies, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies participated in the assessment of Fiqremarqos' works when he qualified for the Fukui Prize in 1995, an example of the institutional support he has enjoyed. The novel was translated into English in an abridged version by Fiqremarkos himself, and his trilogy on the Hamar appeared as a single book under the title *Land of the Yellow Bull* (2003), though the English translation has failed to garner international attention. Like other novels by Fiqremarqos, *Evangadi* has become the

---

[45] 'The selection of his characters, their meaningful names and their activities clearly portray and reflect the life of the Oromo nation with an answered question they still raise in Ethiopia which went on for more than a century now' (YL).

[46] Ibid.

[47] The author mentioned in the acknowledgement section of *Evangadi* that these individuals helped him and supported his works.

topic of several MA theses within Amharic literature departments in Ethiopia. Similarly, the works of Dhaba Wayessa, and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* in particular, are canonical texts and are usually recommended to students of Oromo literature in Ethiopian universities, colleges and high schools. They have also received favourable literary criticism.[48] In other words, these novels have become established within their own literary-linguistic fields but have not become part of a comparative conversation. As far as translations of these novels are concerned, apart from *Evangadi* none has been translated into another Ethiopian or foreign language.[49] This means that whereas the Amharic novels may have circulated among non-Amhara readers schooled in Amharic, the Oromo novels are unlikely to have reached non-Oromo readers.

---

[48] The endorsement on the back of the novel by Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, an internationally acclaimed Ethiopian author, poet and critic, who was originally Oromo, but wrote in Amharic and English, reads that 'Dhaba shows that he is a dedicated student of Oromo mythology with love and respect for the culture. [...] He has ears for the music of Oromo language, he uses his talent as a medium of to translate the dance, music, costume, and proverbs of the people. He brings the people on the stage-not cultural caricature' (*Gurraacha Abbayaa*, cover page).

[49] There have been some attempts in translating *Yeburqa Zimita* into Afan Oromo and English, but none have made it to publication yet.

Chapter 1
'History has not repeated itself'
Resisting the historiography of the Great Tradition in *Yeburqa Zimita*

'We were once great; we shall be great again!'[50]

In April 2019, on the occasion of a conference in Ambo Town in which high officials of both the Oromia and Amhara regions were present, a newly appointed head office of the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) head quarter, Mr Addisu Arega, directly referred to Tesfaye Gebreab's Amharic historical novel *Yeburqa Zimita* in his speech. Mr Addisu claimed that *Yeburqa Zimita* is a dangerous text due to its 'fake narrative' aim at escalating the already hostile relationship between the Amhara and the Oromo by presenting the former as the enemy of the latter. He added that the novel was sponsored by the TPLF officials for political reasons and blamed them for their divide and rule policy. Addisu's speech went viral on social media, particularly on Facebook and YouTube. To reduce *Yeburqa Zimita* to 'fake narrative' enraged the Oromo public, and Addisu was denounced as a traitor to Oromo history, who disregarded the injustices the Oromo people have been subjected to under the Amhara administration for over a century.

A few days later, people went on the streets denouncing Addisu, and he was forced to publicly apologise for presenting the novel in such a way. He said that he did not mean to call the history/ narrative in the novel 'fake' but was concerned that the way in which the novel presented history would aggravate the hostility between the two ethnic groups (Tesfaye 2019). A few days later, the author, Tesfaye, who is currently living in

[50] Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front slogan introduced after 2005 national election.

Eritrea, responded to Addisu's criticism through the BBC Afan Oromo programme.[51] Tesfaye rejected Addisu's accusation, insisted that his novel had no such an aim, and stressed that it was Addisu who was using the novel for political purposes to impress his Amhara colleagues, with whom he wants to align his party. He recalled with sadness that it was *Yeburqa Zimita* that—far from being sponsored by a government body—was the reason he had ended up in exile (Tesfaye 2019).[52]

The current Ethiopian government under a Prime Minster from then Oromo Democratic Party that came to the power in 2018 amid a violent protest against the Tigrayan-dominated political system, has been keen to forge a harmonious relationship between the Amhara and the Oromo in order to bring peace and stability to the country and to oppose his Tigrayan opponents. Addisu's characterization of the novel needs to be understood against this shifting political backdrop, as Tesfaye noted. The attention given to the novel both by politicians and the public shows how revolutionary this novel still is, not only in Ethiopian literary studies but also in Ethiopian politics. The controversy subsequently increased its popularity, as many people demanded copies of the novel and an Afan Oromo translation circulated on social media (Tesfaye 2019).

A much larger issue lurks behind this disparaging reference to this Amharic novel by an Oromo official. As this case highlights, the Ethiopian past is a highly contested terrain, and anyone who delves into it, whether academically or politically, may find themselves opening a sort of Pandora's Box. Though the Ethiopian government has even recently celebrated its past as 'glorious', that past is a painful memory for

---

[51] April 2019. 'Qeeqa Obbo Addisuu fi deebii Tasfaayee Gabra'aab.' *BBC News Afaan Oromoo*. Retrieved 15 September 2021, from https://www.bbc.com/afaanoromoo/oduu-48010824. [Tesfaye's response to Addisu].
[52] April 2019. 'Qeeqa Obbo Addisuu fi deebii Tasfaayee Gabra'aab.' *BBC News Afaan Oromoo*. Retrieved 15 September 2021, from https://www.bbc.com/afaanoromoo/oduu-48010824.

politically marginalized peoples such as the Oromo.[53] For them, that history and its celebration represent the darker side of the Ethiopian collective identity. Hence, the famous slogan that encapsulated the political vision of the EPRDF government after the 2005 national election—*We were once great; we shall be great again*—cannot be true for the people who were mistreated under Amhara administration.[54]

But just what is so problematic about this novel that people have been fighting over it since its publication? Why are the Oromos so taken with this novel when it is a fictional work in what they consider to be the 'enemy's language'?[55] As this chapter argues, the battle is actually over the historical narratives that the novel presents and the way in which it contests the hegemonic history of the Great Tradition and interprets Ethiopian national history from the perspectives of marginalized peoples. The literary and political responses to *Yeburqa Zimita* thus pertain to a live dispute over national historiography and the denial of the histories of the dominated peoples in Ethiopia. In fact, Amhara elites have attacked the novel from the moment it was published in 2000, claiming that the histories it presents are politically motivated fabrications, and that it was written to favour the Oromo ethnic group (see Demeke Tassew 2014).

1.1 The Ethiopian Great Tradition and its critiques

The Ethiopian national history is underwritten by a paradigm called the Great Tradition. This is a historical understanding that advocates for the supremacy of the Amhara culture and presents them as the only contributors to the Ethiopian civilization.

[53] Several publications in the *Journal of the Oromo Studies* by scholars such as Ezekiel Gebissa (2002, 2008, 2016), Ezekiel and Asafa (2003), Mekuria Bulcha (1994,1995,1997); Mohammed Hassen (1990,2008,2010), Asafa Jalata (1995, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2007); Asafa and Schaffer (2010);Abbas Haji (1994) and others indicate how the Oromo and other ethno-linguistic groups in Ethiopia oppose and downplay the rhetoric of the glorious past of Ethiopia.

[54] In this election, the TPLF-dominated EPRDF was seriously challenged; the government eventually rigged the election results and remained in power (Marzagora 2017).

[55] See Alemseged (2013).

As I show in the following two chapters, history written under the influence of this paradigm either passes in silence the histories of the non-Amhara peoples in the country or reduces them to mere oral tradition or fabricated history (Clapham 2002; Kumssa 1990; Levine 1974, 2011, 2012; Sorenson 1993). According to the proponents of the Great Tradition, Ethiopia can be placed beside the great ancient civilizations like China and Persia due to its '[possession] of all of the essential elements, including notably some impressive archaeological remains, a monarchy to provide a line of heroic rulers, an ancient Christianity that links it with the civilisations of the Mediterranean basin, and most important of all, writing' (Clapham 2002:39).

Besides, the Great Tradition has its unique ways of understanding Ethiopian history. According to Marzagora (2017), for example, the Great Tradition is 'characterized first, by a teleological vision of history based on the prophecy of Ethiopia's earthly glory and eschatological victory, and, second, by an essentialist, transcendental, and unicentric conception of national, subnational, and individual identities' (p.441). In a manner it reflects Foucault's (1972) idea of inseparability of power and knowledge, this mode of history was highly supported by the Ethiopian emperors. For example, Haile Selassie institutionalized and legitimized this history in Ethiopian academia through the establishment of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Department of History and Journal of Ethiopian Studies at Haile Selassie I University in the 1960s. In the context of literary studies, too, the Ethiopian Writers Association can be one example. All these institutions form the body of the Ethiopian studies and devoted to the promotion and development of the history of the Great Tradition and impact on the literary studies is unavoidably visible.

In the meantime, how does this historical understanding inform fictional and non-fictional works in Ethiopia? The answers to this question form the background for the discussion I present in Chapters 1 and 2. The foundational text of the history of the

Great Tradition is the *Kibre Negest* (*Glory of Kings*) written in the 14th century (Marzagora 2017; Toggia 2008). The book has become source of inspiration for the Ethiopianist historians and Amharic fiction writers, and this is reflected in their works. For example, Nebyu Gebre Michael (2012) shows that the *Kibre Negest* shares major structural elements and themes with the first Amharic novel, *Tobbiya/ Ye Lebb Welled Tarik* (1908) and another recent popular novel *Dertogada* (2012) as they all 'attempt to romantically glorify the Ethiopian national image/portrait in their narratives' (p.107). In a similar fashion, Yonas Admassu (1995) adds that this book has greatly influenced history writing and reading in Ethiopia.

One popular non-fictional work in which the influence of the Great Tradition is reflected in is Bahru Zewde's (2001) history book, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1990*. First, it presents the antiquity of Ethiopian history that goes even more than 3000 years regardless the non-existence of the country before the late 19th century, the time when the current boundary was clearly set. Second, it propagates a long-lived unity among the present Ethiopian peoples, but who lived in and outside the former Abyssinia's jurisdiction until they were forcibly brought together in the second half of the 19th century. Bahru uses the trade interaction between these people to claim the unity though the peoples never lived together as a nation before the beginning of the 20th century (Semir 2009:382). Third, the book narrates the national history from the perspective of the victorious Amhara emperors and lionizes them while the views of the occupied people are glossed over. Fourth, it reflects the essentialization of land and the use of grand concepts like Ethiopia (Semir 2009). All the lands within the current Ethiopian border are presented as already Ethiopian even before the formation of the state. The intention is to rationalize Menelik's war of expansion as a mission of state formation, or a civilizing mission; however, for the occupied people like the Oromo, the purpose of the invasion is to control and exploit their resources, as suggested in *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* Lastly, the 'naming of places and placing of names' (Semir

2009:382) in Bahru's book chimes with the similar practice in the history of the Great Tradition. For example, when Bahru deals with the encounters between the Ethiopian people living in the northern and southern regions of the country, he used different naming styles. A war between Shewa, where Menelik first reigned, and any part of the country in south, say, Arsi, it is presented as a 'civil war', between two 'brothers', between two regions destined to come under one "home" (Semir 2009:383). When the same Shewa or any part of former Abyssinia fights with a foreign country, the event is presented as a conflict 'between Ethiopia and that foreign country' (Ibid). In the meantime, *Yoomi Laataa?* presents such historical events with a different perspective from that of Bahru and does not generalize all aggression from the north as Ethiopian.

In a similar vein, the Great Tradition underwrites some Amharic historical fictions. Though history and fiction are understood as different disciplines, 'fiction need not always be seen as antithetical to history and it is worthwhile historians considering the possibility that the adoption and adaptation of some of the methods and techniques used in the creation of fiction might have the potential to assist in the writing of history' (Hatcher 2012:6-7). That is to say, historical fiction and historiography, particularly those produced within the same tradition, greatly influence or share from each other, and this is reflected in Amharic historical fiction and the Ethiopianist Great Tradition, which are both based on the Amhara world view, reflect the same relationship.

For example, if, as Marzagora (2017) observes, '[h]istory-writing in the Christian highlands had always been concerned with big men (and occasionally women), whether rulers or religious figures' (p.10), the same is true of Amharic historical fiction.[56] Most Amharic historical novels, however, deal with the selected few historical

[56]The majority of popular Amharic historical novels are named after rulers like Emperor Tewodros (r. 1855-68), Emperor Yohannes IV (r.1872-1886), and military leaders such as Alula Abba Nega and Belay Zeleqe who fought against foreign aggressors: to name a few *Yetewodos Enba* (Berhanu Zerihun 1966), and *And Lennatu* (Abbe Gubenya,1969).

events that echo the main concerns of the Great Tradition. To mention a few among the many, the Italian occupation, the Ethiopian Civil War of the Derg era, and other foreign aggressions. Unlike *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?,* Amharic historical novels emphasize only selected points that the proponents of the Great Tradition believe glorify the emperors of their interest (for example, Tewodros) or the groups they believe uphold the image of Ethiopia liked by the Amhara. As Taye notes, Tewodros, who initiated the formation of the modern Ethiopian state, is one of the most popular subjects, with six novels and a play about him (Taye 1983:115). As I show here below in the case of one Amharic novel dedicated to Emperor Tewodros, not only the content, but also the narrative form of the novels reflects the form of the narratives of the Great Tradition.

And Lennatu (*His Mother's only Son*) is a historical novel by Abbe Gubenya (1969) and the novel features Emperor Tewodros as it is aimed at reconstructing the image of the emperor so as to portray his 'humanly' characteristics, that is, neither presenting him as an angel nor as a demon (p.16). In the meantime, the novel, as stated in an extended prefatory note (pp.9-42), explicitly aimed at justifying the wrong deeds or crimes committed by the emperor and blaming his subordinates for provoking him through their rebellious resistance to his 'good' ideas for them and the country. Though the novel does not entirely deny the problems inherent to the personality of the emperor, it attempts to normalize them by arguing that he was not the only ruler in the world to inflict such brutal punishments and killings on the dissidents. From the perspective of its narrative form, in its title, characterization as well as focalization, the novel promotes one perspective, that is, the benevolence and good intention of the emperor. The title of the novel captures this narrative reality as it implies the emperor was not only the only son for his biological mother, but also, he was *the only son* for his mother land—who

stood firm, but alone, for the unity and greatness of his country. The narrative is presented under the overarching view of the extradiegetic and authoritative narrator under which the views of other characters are manipulated to justify the crimes committed by the emperor so that they never reduce the honor and reverence he should deserve as a great ruler of his country.

Like Bahiru's book, the novel presents Ethiopia as ancient state, for example, by portraying Tewodros as an Ethiopian ruler though the country with this name was formed almost after 30 years after his death. Lastly, the author explicitly tells us that the novel contributes to the development of Amharic and attempts to justify some problems in its orthography and concludes that Amharic alphabets are better than English's (p.12).

Despite of its popularization by non-fictional and fictional writers, and the support by the state, the history of the Great Tradition is subjected to serious attacks by the scholars and writers usually identified as the 'ethnonationalists' in Ethiopian studies. First, the Great Tradition is accused for its 'representational crisis'(Toggia 2008:337), that is, it excludes the history of the majority of Ethiopian peoples as it 'reflects only state history of the dominant military and political groups'(p.320). In a similar fashion, the partiality of the Great Tradition is reflected in the representation of historical places and periods. According to Clapham (2002), it exclusively focuses on places and periods such as 'Axum, Lalibela, the medieval empire, the resistance to Roman Catholicism, and especially the creation of the modern Ethiopian state at the hands of Tewodros and Menilek' (p.41) where it believes glorify its supremacy while it ignores other places that reflect the civilization of the non-Amhara people. Second, it follows one overarching

plot that reflects 'the permanence, continuity, and unity of the Ethiopian state from ancient times to the present' (Toggia 2008:321).[57]

The attacks on the Great Tradition can be categorized under two groups. The first one was first proposed by one of the master minds of the Ethiopian Students' Movement, Walellign Mekonnin, who published an article in 1969 in which he clearly articulated that the Ethiopian national culture is under the Amhara (to some extent Tigray) hegemony. Walellign's critique was later picked up by the TPLF and developed into what is known as the 'national oppression thesis' as also reflected in *Yeburqa Zimita*. For the TPLF, the oppression in Ethiopia is class-based: it was the ruling class that oppressed the peoples in the country regardless of their ethnic background.[58] The second is the 'colonial thesis' proposed by the EPLF and OLF. According to this group, the modern Ethiopian state is characterized by a form of internal colonialism imposed upon the non-Semitic peoples (ibid). This group attacked the Great Tradition in several ways. For both OLF and EPLF, the three-thousand-year history is a mere fiction fabricated, for example according to the EPLF, to support 'the realization of [the Amhara feudalists'] expansionist ambitions: to put a large country under this dictatorship through the claim of 3,000 years' (quoted in Marzagora 2017:439). Likewise, the OLF questioned the existence of Ethiopia as a country before the second half of the

[57] As presented by both Ethiopian and the foreign Ethiopianist historians, the main plot of the history of the Great Tradition begins with the rise of Axumite state and birth of Solomonic dynasty, being toppled by the Zagwe dysnasty only to be replaced by Solomonic dynasty in 12th century and then lasts up to the 1974 Revolution (For detail discussion, see Aleqa 1972; Hable 1972; Levine 1974; Pankhurst 1967; Perham 1969; Tamrat 1972; Tekle Tsadik 1959, 1961, 1968; Ullendorff 1968; Ullendorff 1960; Wolde-Selassie 2007; Wold-Mesqel 1950).

[58]According to Marzagora (2017), '[t]he TPLF proposed instead a new regionalist version of highland nationalism based on Tigrayan historical achievements. The Aksumite Empire, rather than the Solomonic saga, was presented as the first historical manifestation of Ethiopianness. … While regionalist, the TPLF vision was also Pan-Ethiopianist, as the heritage of Tigray was thought to stand for the whole of the country' (p.441).

19th century. As I show in the subsequent chapters, *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* can be seen as texts epitomizing the 'colonial thesis' as they capitalize on ethnic-based oppression in Ethiopia. They contest several core tenets of the Great Tradition that we have seen above. This forms the core themes of the counter- hegemonic narratives/ histories. As I show in the next two chapters, the counter- hegemonic narratives became more visible after the fall of the Derg regime.

After 1991, Ethiopia entered a new political scenario, as I have mentioned in the introduction. There was a fundamental shift in Ethiopian political discourse as the country changed from a unitary political system to ethno-linguistic based federalism. The interpretation of the Ethiopian past, particularly history and historiography, also swerved from the path that had dominated political and academic discourses since the formation of the Ethiopian empire in the early twentieth century. According to Marzagora (2017), the new government of the EPRDF dropped 'the use of imperial symbols of nationhood in public life', and the Amhara emperors 'were disparaged for their human rights abuses and crimes against the Ethiopian people' (p.440). The two historical novels discussed respectively in this and the following chapter, *Yeburqa Zimita* (*Burqa's Silence*, 2000) and *Yoomi Laataa?* (*When Shall It Be?*, 2010), both date from this period and present narratives that criticise national history for side lining such 'abuses and crimes'.

For example, through its thematic selection of the wars in Ethiopian history, a spatial imagination that introduces new geographies and redefines the old geographies of the Great Tradition, and narrative strategies such as shifting focalization and multiple narrators, dialogism and direct representation of the speeches, *Yeburqa Zimita* contests the historiography and the history of the Great Tradition from two perspectives. First, it foregrounds the oral histories of the marginalized peoples and their war memories (particularly of Menelik's war of expansion) which were mostly downplayed by mainstream historians, thereby contesting the narrative of the Great Tradition. Second,

it contests the emphasis the historiography of the Great Tradition places on single heroes and its narration from an omniscient authoritative perspective and exposes how reductionist and inhibiting such an approach is. In so doing, the novel foregrounds counter-hegemonic narratives both through its content and form. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, it introduces the novel and the thematic and narrative strategies through which it presents the historical themes. Second, it discusses the two main perspectives through which the history of the Great Tradition is challenged, and counter-hegemonic narratives are foregrounded.

1.2 Storying war histories

Yeburqa Zimita is a historical novel about the wars in Ethiopia and the socio-political crises they brought about. It mainly deals with the Ethiopian Civil War that haunted the Derg regime of Mengistu Hailemariam (r. 1974-91) in the 1970s and 1980s, and the political and security crises during the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) from 1991 to 1995.[59] But it also retrospectively presents the memories of Menelik's war of empire expansion of the 19th century. Thanks to the diversity of its themes and plotlines, it is the most thematically dense and structurally complex among the novels I analyse in this thesis. It consists of three main sections: the prologue, the main body, and the epilogue. As we shall see, the novel shifts back and forth between the past history of imperial expansion/occupation and the recent history of war.

The prologue begins with the shocking news of the unexpected murder of the famous Tigrayan guerrilla fighter Commander Hayelom Araya (a historical figure), whose extraordinary performance contributed to the overthrow the Derg government. This

[59] The time when the story begins is mentioned indirectly by the narrator when he reports the meeting between President Mengistu and his Minister of National Security, 'The president does not look that he heard any good news over the past 15 years' (p.16). In this statement, 'the last 15 years 'refers to the time when Mengistu came to power in 1974. There is no direct clue about the time when the story ends, but it appears to be during the period of the TGE between 1991 and 1995.

section is narrated by a homodiegetic narrator (the author-narrator who acts like a character in the narrative), who directly engages into an extended conversation with another character, Abraha Tselot, an Eritrean official, about the murder. It ends with the narrator introducing a woman character, of whom he mentions the gender, ethnic affiliation, profession and physical appearance but not her name. The prologue provides the background context to the novel in two ways. First, it gives information about the political relationships between the Oromo, the Tigrayan and the Eritrean through the Oromo female protagonist's (Hawani Waqo) presence in Eritrea and her close friendship with Hayelom. Such an interethnic alliance is uncommon in the Amharic novelistic tradition that it is narratively reflected in the surprise way that the homodiegetic narrator expresses at hearing about the Oromo woman in Eritrea.[60] Second, the prologue highlights the history of the TPLF's political struggle by presenting a report about an unexpected murder of a prominent TPLF's war leader, who is the main centre of the novel. Though the prologue makes no explicitly reference to the story from which the title of the novel derives, it hints at the presence of the Oromo through the woman character.

The main body of the novel differs structurally from the prologue as it is narrated mostly by one extradiegetic narrator and several homodiegetic narrators. It is divided in to three major parts each composed of five chapters, further divided into several subsections. The first two parts (Chapters 1-10) are largely devoted to the war between the Derg government and the Eritrean and Tigrayan liberation fronts, and the conflict between the Oromo and the Amhara in the south-central Ethiopia. The last five chapters, which make up part three, are about the post-war political uncertainties and security

[60] 'As you guessed, she is not a Tigrayan. She is an Oromo', said Abraha. I responded in a total disbelief 'I never believe you. Why does a woman, who is an Oromo, EPRDF fighter and faints when she hears Hayelom's murder, come to Eretria? (*YZ* 8).

problems that engulfed the TGE. Interspersed within these narratives of the recent historical past are memories of Menelik's war of expansion in the second half of the 19th century. This history of war and post-war political turmoil are intertwined with the personal experiences of the protagonists, Anole Waqo and his sister Hawani, under three major plotlines. The three major plotlines, the protagonists, and their mutual relationships are introduced right in Chapter 1 in the form of a report about urgent security issues presented to President Mengistu by his minister for the National Security Affairs.

The first plotline relates to the discovery of the place where the TPLF polity group have hidden themselves, and how the Derg government needs to act in order to destroy the TPLF fighters. The Derg officials have come to know the place through a spy who has infiltrated the TPLF guerrilla fighters. The main protagonists of this plotline are Hayelom and the Oromo female historian Hawani Waqo, whose personal histories are intertwined with the history the TPLF. Hawani has joined Hayelom in order to document Hayelom's military achievements before herself becoming a TPLF liberation fighter. The overall political history of the TPLF and its allies is thus presented to us through the active interaction of Hawani with Hayelom and his friends.

The second plotline relates to the capture by the Derg forces of a top Eritrean secret agent, Abraha Tselot, in Asmara and his interrogation in order to gain information about the military secrets of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. Through the dialogues between Abraha and Anole, the other (male) Oromo protagonist of the novel, who has been sent by the Derg government to Asmara to conduct an assessment on the Eritrean prisoners, the novel presents the history of the ruthless crackdown of the Derg government on Eritrean civilians, its inhumane treatment of the inmates in the Asmara prison cells, the resilience of the Eritrean liberation fronts and their skilful manipulation

of the Derg military system. These two points of the reports are presented as good news to the president, but the third point is bad news.

It is about the small village of Burqa in the south-central Ethiopia, where 1000 Oromo farmers have rebelled in revenge against the Amhara settlers. It is this story that gives the title to the novel and made prominent. The Oromo rebellion is a serious concern for the Derg government and is discussed at a length by the officials and the narrator. The root cause of the rebellion takes us back in history and to the prophecy that gives the novel its title: the history is that of the brutalities committed by Emperor Menelik on the Oromo during the war of expansion in the second half of the 19th century, and the prophecy told by Waqo about the connection between his death and the beginning of the Oromo war with the Amhara: according to it, Waqo's death will signal the time for the Oromo to launch a war on the Amhara settlers, and after they succeed, the river Burqa, which flows out from under the hill on which the village stands, will once again start to flow overground. Anole Waqo is once again a main character in this plotline, and it is through him that we are introduced to the personal and collective memories of Menelik's war with the Oromo. Anole successfully manages to curb the conflict in Burqa, and Part 1 ends with his departure to Asmara.

Part 2 of the novel (Chapters 6 to 10) mainly focuses on the war between the Derg and the Eritrean and the Tigrayan liberation fronts. It begins with Anole's travel to Eritrea, where he interviews the inmates in the Eritrean prisons and holds discussions with Derg generals. The interviews reveal how the Derg government is arbitrary and brutal even towards its own military personnel, highlighting how this self-destructive attitude eventually contributed to its collapse. The discussions also shed light on the political history of Eritrea and how the Eritreans' arguments for secession from Ethiopia are historically justified. The form of the interview and dialogue thus allows for critical views to emerge from both within the Derg and from its Eritrean opponents. As in the

first part, the Oromo protagonist learns about the history of his own people as well as of other people oppressed by the Amhara-led Ethiopian regimes and develops broader political solidarities.

Chapter 10 focuses on the last few moments of the Derg and its eventual collapse, marked by celebrations in Asmara. On this occasion, we are introduced to the political agenda of two parties that claim to struggle for the Oromo people, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), once again through an extended dialogue between Anole Waqo, Dr. Bulcha Waqgari of the OLF and Kumsa of the OPDO. The second section ends with Anole's return to Addis Ababa from his exile in the Red Sea islands, where he was hosted by the EPLF after he betrayed the Derg government, and his memory of a conversation with the Burqa elders narrated in the last chapter of Part 1. This memory signals the novel's return to the Burqa farmers' story in the next section.

Part 3 encompasses the last five chapters (Chapters 11 to 15) and is mostly devoted to the political crises, the rickety administrative structure of the TGE, the corruption and immorality among the government officials. Chapter 11, entitled '*yeburqa quta, zimitegnaw burqa*' [Burqa's anger, silent Burqa],[61] metaphorically captures the Oromo anger simmering in Burqa village for a second time. Unlike the title of Chapter 1, which clearly states that Burqa's silence is over and issued a warning to the *neftenyas*,[62] this title indicates that Burqa is still silent but is angry zooming in on the fact that the Oromo political quest is ignored also under the new government. Unlike in Chapter 1, the Burqa's story is presented in the form of a meeting between the TPLF officials in

[61] የቡርቃ ቁጣ፣ ዝምተኛው ቡርቃ

[62] This expression is used in this novel to address the Amhara children, relatives and followers of Menelik's soldiers who invaded the Oromo land during the war of occupation. The *neftenya* system is the system of administration developed by the Amhara ruling class in which they oppressed the non-Amhara people.

which the Oromo grievance is reduced to what a TPLF official, Kinfe Gebremedhin (a historical character), calls '*yezirfiya budin*'[63] (a group of looters) (318); the name of the group is designated as '*yeburqa zimita*' (Burqa's silence). Burqa's silence, which gives the novel its title and derives from the prophecy first presented in Chapter 1, stands for different things for different characters. For Waqo and Anole in Chapter 1, as I discuss in greater detail below, it symbolises the Oromo's unusual silence after they were defeated by Menelik. For the TGE official in Chapter 11, it is the name of an organised criminal group looting the properties of Amhara wealthy families who, the group thinks, have exploited Oromo resources for free. The novel seems to support the first meaning, as a symbolic representation of the Oromo's silence which supposedly ends after Waqo's death, when the Oromo in Burqa rise against the oppressors once and for all.

In the three final chapters, both Anole and Hawani return to Burqa. Anole takes active part in the conflict in Burqa and, the narrator tells us, he provides the farmers with firearms. Besieged by Hayelom's force, Anole is eventually helped by Hayelom to escape to Asmara. Meanwhile, Hawani, who is presented by the narrator as well as by other former militants as emotionally unstable and inappropriate for the TPLF led EPRDF politics, is not given a significant political position and finally gives up on politics. Though she is ally with the TPLF, she is found inappropriate for their politics and eventually arrested by the TPLF officials for sharing her views with her brother Anole on the TPLF political domination and indifference towards Oromo political demands. Towards the end of this section, Hawani announces that she will go back to Burqa and engage in agriculture so as to help her people utilize the natural resources of the land. While in Burqa, Hawani finds Anole's diary with the help of some farmers who used to meet Anole before he left for Asmara for a second time. It is through this

[63] የዝርፍያ ቡድን

diary that we learn in detail about the conflict in Burqa and its historical background. Besides, the diary documents Anole's conversation with Hayelom, which contains interesting historical elements to which I return in the next section.

The novel's epilogue structurally and narratively reprises the prologue and ties up the loose ends of unfinished stories. It begins where the prologue ends, with the narrator meeting Hawani in Eritrea. As in the prologue, the narrator tells us that he meets Anole so as to be able to use his diary and Hayelom's letter (that he gets from Anole) to write the story of Burqa's silence and of the conflict between the Oromo and the Amhara. Hayelom's two-page letter is quoted in full. The epilogue shows how both Anole and Hawani, young, educated Oromos who have pursued different life and political trajectories, end up confused without achieving the political vision entrusted on them by the people of Burqa, and both still thinking in their different ways. Anole, Hawani tells the narrator, is thinking of leading an armed struggle against the TPLF, whereas Hawani does not support this idea. Hawani is still thinking about writing books, though she never finishes Hayelom's biography and seems to drop the idea.

As this summary shows, *Yeburqa Zimita* employs complex narrative strategies in order to present the perspectives of different peoples about the Ethiopian Civil War and the impact of Menelik's war of expansion on the political and social landscape of Ethiopia. The stories are connected through the characters, who interact and shift from one plotline to the other, establishing dialogic interactions between the different voices. The relationships between Anole and Abraha Tselot, or Hawani and Hayelom, symbolise the political solidarity between the ethnic groups that these characters are affiliated with. These interactions are enhanced by the shared spaces that people with different views occupy. As the next section shows, the characters' utterances and names are relevant to the history of the Great Tradition and to counter-hegemonic narratives. In the rest of the chapter, I focus on how *Yeburqa Zimita* resists the history of the Great Tradition through its content and form. The novel re-interprets important events in

Ethiopian history to articulate counter-hegemonic narratives from the perspective of marginalized peoples and juxtaposes them with some of the main tenets of the Great Tradition. My analysis focuses on narrative strategies such as characterization, spatial re-imagination, internal focalization, direct speech representation, use of multiple homodiegetic narrators and dialogism and how these strategies are manipulated by the author to represent the voices of the marginalized peoples.

1.3 Narrative techniques and history in *Yeburqa Zimita*

This section explores how narrative techniques are utilized to highlight changes in historical representation thereby they foreground the counter-hegemonic narratives. Spatial (re)imagination is one of the narrative techniques that historical fiction writers commonly resort to. In historical novels such as *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* (presented in the next chapter), which present contested spaces and pasts, spatial imagination, or rather re-imagination, is of great importance.[64] Most of the events in *Yeburqa Zimita* take place in the northern regions of Ethiopia, particularly Tigray and Eritrea, while others occur in the central region of the country, mainly Addis Ababa and Burqa village. The novel remaps and re-imagines the significant geographies of the Amharic historical novels and the history of the Great Tradition in two ways. First, it introduces new real geographies (the Arsi region and other places in southern Ethiopia) and imagined significant geographies (like, for example, an autonomous region of Oromia), thereby expanding the geographical scope of Amharic novels. Second, the narrative redefines older significant geographies in the Amharic literary tradition, such

[64] The characters in narrative texts 'move around, inhabit and experience different spaces and locations', Teresa Bridgeman (2007) argues, '[allow] readers to construct complex worlds in their minds' (p.52). Further readings on space in narrative fiction include (Dannenberg 2008; De Bleeker 2014; Herman 2003; Kinser 1984; Ronen 1986; Zoran 1984). The use of the concept of significant geographies (Laachir et al. 2018a; Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini 2018c; Orsini and Zecchini 2019) in general and narrative geographies, to use Moretti's (1998) expression, underwrites my analysis of the historical narratives in the two novels.

as the northern highlands, Addis Ababa, battlefields like Anole, and Ethiopia itself, by changing/ revisiting the significance conferred on these places.

This spatial re-imagination is highlighted in the title of the novel: Burqa, the name of a river in southcentral Ethiopia, is an uncommon practice (using an Oromo word for a novel title in Amharic) in Amharic novelistic tradition, as far as the place of Oromo language in Amharic literature is concerned. The river is found in the Arsi Oromo land, the area known, in the Ethiopian history, for being a centre for the resistance against the Amhara expansionists (Abbas 1994). Other specific real geographies in this region such as Burqa village, Anole, Ogoljo, Hamaga, Abba Bokku Hill, Arba Gugu and Mount Kaka are remembered by the Oromo characters for several reasons though with a varying degree of significance owed to each of them. All these significant geographies are mentioned by the characters and the narrator in *Yeburqa Zimita* in connection with the specific historical events that happened in them, and the individual and collective memories ascribed to each of them.

Among the more historically prominent geographies, Anole is the most significant for Oromo characters and readers in this novel, since it was one of the places where Menelik's force defeated the Arsi Oromo. In Oromo collective memory, the brutal battle at Anole is commonly referred to as *'bara harma muraa fi harka muraa Aanole'* (the year of the amputation of hands and breasts) (Mohammed 2008b:26). The story of the Anole incident is narrated by Waqo, who tells us the first-hand personal experiences about the war between the Arsi and the Menelik's force. Over the past three decades, the significance given to Anole and other similar historical sites, has increased, and become more political in Ethiopia. The EPRDF built a memorial statue at Anole, and this sparked a grievance among the Amhara activists, who do not want their emperor to be accused of such a crime, so that they deny the happening of this incident. They argue that the story about Anole incident, particularly, the story about the amputation of limbs and breasts is fictionally invented by the TPLF, OLF and EPLF in order to pit the

Oromo against Amhara so that their unity never happens[65]. The Oromo elites and some prominent activists understand this argument as a denial of the Oromo true history and the manipulation of historical facts. Through a technique of characterization and dialogization of this name, the novel makes this story more significant and memorable when Waqo gives this name to the Oromo protagonist, Anole Waqo. This story is focalized by Abba Boru, another Oromo man who has a similar experience with the war and tells us Waqo uses the name to remember the annihilation of the Oromo at Anole. I return to this point in the subsequent section.

Abba Bokku Hill is another historically significant geography for the Oromo characters in *Yeburqa Zimita*. According to Anole's diary that read to us by Hawani in Chapter 15, two important incidents happened on this hill. The first incident happened in the late 19th century during the Menelik's war of expansion when an Oromo patriot Abba Bokku confronted with Haile Raguel, a Menelik's general. Abba Bokku was defeated and asked to surrender, but he refused. This story is narrated by Anole Waqo, who wants to relate his present situation with a historical incident happened a century ago. When Anole writes this message in his diary, he himself is surrounded by a TPLF defence force under the command of Hayelom. In the meantime, Hayelom writes a letter to Anole in which he persuades him to surrender. In this section of diary that directly addressed to Hawani, Anole dialogises Hayelom's letter when he relates the incident to a century-old case of Abba Bokku. He concludes that history has repeated itself on this very hill when he compares Hayelom's force with Haile's force as he calls both of them the *neftenyas* and compares himself with Abba Bokku. However, he is cognizant of the difference between the two forces, as he mentions that the new *neftenyas* are not like the older ones for they give him chance twice before they attack

[65] The main reason, I presume, why the Amhara nationalists, who advocate the Amhara supremacy under the guise of one Ethiopia, is that these three fronts originally come up with the ethnic based rights or identity politics, have introduced ethno-linguistic federalism.

him. Later in the epilogue, we come to know that Hayelom's letter in which he promised to Anole 'history has not repeated itself'[66] and Anole changes his mind and escapes to Asmara through the help of Hayelom. I reflect on how other significant geographies are re-imagined or redefined throughout my remaining discussion.

As I have mentioned so far, the re-imagination of significant geographies has significantly impacted the representation of historical narratives in *Yeburqa Zimita*. Just from the very beginning, we are directed to new historical places in the southcentral Ethiopia, so that the former Abyssinia is no longer the only centre where the narrative development is framed, that is, the war memories are not only narrated from the vantage point of the victorious Amhara invaders as in the national history of the Great Tradition. The governing reasoning behind such spatial re-imagination, I argue, is the recognition or agency given to the speaking body or the subjects of history. Shared places like Addis Ababa, whose significance continues to strive in the history of the Great Tradition as well as counter hegemonic narratives, evokes a careful juxtaposition of different competing perspectives. For example, for the Oromo characters like Abba Boru and Waqo, it is not a significant place, but for Anole it is the capital and he is critical of its changed name. For Rosa, an Eritrean spy, it is significant for its better climatical condition, not for anything else.

The spatial re-imagination that *Yeburqa Zimita* presents shifts the significance given to historical places within the northern region itself. This is made following the shift in the political power domination from the ruling Amhara elites to the TPLF and EPLF. Historical places such as Axum, Lalibela and Gondar, which are the centre of Abyssinian civilization in the national historiography, are unknown or not memorable for people like Waqo, Anole and many other characters in Burqa, like Hordofa and Abba Boru. Other places like Abba Bokku Hill, Anole, Ogoljo in the southern central are

---

[66] 'ታሪክ እራሱን አልደገመም ' (454)።

much more significant for the Oromo characters in the novel than the northern centres of Ethiopianist civilization. In conclusion, as far as the concept of significant geographies is concerned, as a corollary, not just the places but the lives and the narratives of the people who live in these marginalized significant geographies become an important part of the counter-hegemonic narratives. Whereas nationalist historians like Bahru Zewde (2003) side line or even suppress other perspectives, in *Yeburqa Zimita*, the people, both as group and as individual characters in the occupied places, are treated as independent agents (Massey 2005) and makers of their own history.

Second, the speech representation strategies employed by *Yeburqa Zimita* are also important for the articulation of the counter-hegemonic narratives. Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) identified three types of fictional discourse: 'direct discourse', 'objective discourse' and 'double-voiced discourse'. In novels characterized by direct discourse, Bakhtin argues, the voice of the author dominates and renders such novels monologic. In objective discourse, conversely, 'the speech of characters [is] represented in the form of diaries, letters, dialogue, soliloquy, and interior monologue' (Shen 2006:48). Such a discourse can be presented when individual characters are used to present a predetermined unified ideology of the author or when the characters' speech '[exposes] a diversity of ideology within the narrative; the character's discourse can suggest multiple ideologies under the author's control' (p. 48-9). Though we find many examples of objective discourse in *Yeburqa Zimita*, by putting these and other forms of heteroglossia into dialogic interactions among the characters and narrators, the novel dialogizes the discourses and magnifies their double-voicedness. This is the third form of discourse that Bakhtin recognises, and I consider it as the main focus of analysis in the study. Dialogic interaction in particular is used to represent and foreground historical themes, both that of the Great Tradition and the counter-hegemonic narratives. *Yeburqa Zimita* does this in two ways. First, through internally dialogized speeches or

perspectives of the characters, mainly the protagonists like Anole and Hawani, who present an array of historical themes. Second, through heteroglossic inserts such as the Oromo displacement song, Hawani's written report, folk tales, Anole's diary, and Hayelom's letter are imbued with historical elements that matter to the proponents of the Great Tradition and of counter-hegemonic narratives. In the subsequent sections, I dwell on these elements and the narrative techniques used to present them.

Yeburqa Zimita contests the hegemonic history of the Ethiopian Great Tradition from within the tradition of Amharic literature itself through the narrative strategies presented above along with thematic selection by focusing on the histories of wars from the perspectives of the dominated peoples. Through content and form, the novel questions and resists the way how history is written or narrated in the mainstream Ethiopian studies. Therefore, I argue that *Yeburqa Zimita* contests the historiography and the historical representation of the Great Tradition, first, by storying oral history of the dominated and marginalized peoples, and second, by showing the impossibility of history writing through the conventional approaches of the historiography of the Great Tradition.

Anole Waqo focalizes the histories of the victims of the Menelik's war of expansion such as the Oromo, Yem, Wolayitta, and Kafa, whereas Hawani Waqo is a historian who attempts to write a biography of Hayelom, but vehemently resisted by Hayelom and other TPLF officials that she consults. Through them, alternative ways of history writing, and historical representation (writing history from below) are foregrounded, and the point of view from where the history is told is shifted from the dominant voice to the dominated voice. However, the dominant voice is not ignored all together, but reduced to the view of minor characters.

Anole's understanding of the Ethiopian political history reflects what Marzagora (2017) calls, the 'colonial thesis'. Hawani's case is different and less clear cut. First of all, she studied history at the institution dominated by the proponents of the Great Tradition

and her original approach to history writing shows that her understanding is influenced by the Great Tradition, as we shall see. Later on, though, she becomes a supporter of the 'national oppression thesis' (ibid), as her conference report presented in the novel shows. In short, it can be argued that the two protagonists represent counter-hegemonic narratives, but the author distances them from being the mouth pieces of the specific political groups that promote these historical understandings of Ethiopian political history. Hawani tends to believe that written history is more reliable, whereas Anole fully relies on the oral history he learned mostly from his foster father, Waqo, as we shall see.

The resistance against the historiography of the Great Tradition begins with the characterization of Anole and Hawani, and this, in turn, makes characterization an important narrative strategy in presenting counter-hegemonic narratives. As I have mentioned earlier, character portrayal and selection in Amharic novels are Amhara-centred, and characters with non-Amhara identities rarely figure or, if present, are reduced to minor positions. Anole and Hawani are explicitly presented as Oromo characters: their names are Oromo proper names; they speak Afan Oromo as their mother tongue, and they advocate for the Oromo cause and nationalism. Above all, they promote Oromo world views. The way how both of them are introduced also stresses their Oromo identity. For example, in the prologue, where Hawani first introduced, though her name is not mentioned, her identity as an Oromo woman is emphatically stated. This is indicated in the reaction of disbelief of the homodiegetic narrator when he hears from an Eritrean character, Abraha Tselot, that Hawani is an Oromo and Hayelom's close friend: 'As you guessed, she is not a Tigrayan. She is an Oromo', said Abraha. I responded in a total disbelief 'I never believe you. Why does a woman, who is an Oromo, EPRDF fighter and faints when she hears Hayelom's murder, come to Eretria? (*YZ* 8).

The first chapter of the novel after the prologue goes back to the challenges that the Derg government faced due to its protracted war with the Eritrean and Tigrayan liberation fighters. However, the Oromo conflict with the Amhara is also presented a serious concern for the Derg government and is discussed at a length by the officials and the narrator. It is in this discussion that Anole's identity is revealed. President Mengistu tells his minister that he does not want to get into a conflict with the Oromo so that he urges the minister to intervene in order to curb the simmering conflict before it explodes. At this point the minster mentions that Anole Waqo has been selected to go to Burqa to settle the conflict. The president expresses a similar disbelief when he hears that Anole is an Oromo, just like the homodiegetic narrator about Hawani. By presenting such strong emotional reactions in the non-Oromo characters, the author shows what an uncommon presence Oromos are in Amharic literary tradition, how uncommon it is to selecting an Oromo for serious political missions like Anole's, and a strong link that an Oromo like Hawani has with the TPLF and Eritreans.

Another important point through which the characterization of Anole and Hawani foregrounds counter hegemonic narratives is the dramatic context in which they appear as members of the Oromo community of Burqa village. Their birth as characters is related to a heinous historical event, the Massacre of Ogoljo (YZ 78-9). In other words, the author historicises their characterization through naming, in the case of Anole, and relates their history to a historical incident. The story of the Ogoljo Massacre is worth telling in full because it sheds light on Anole and Hawani's identity, and on how their presence in the novel promotes counter-hegemonic narratives. The massacre took place in Ogoljo, a small village in the vicinity of Burqa. According to Abba Boru, who narrates the story to Anole, the people in the village were dissatisfied with the bad administration of Haile Selassie's government and rebelled (Abba Boru does not tell us precisely what they refused to do). The emperor's response was harsh, and the military forces burned down the village and murdered all its inhabitants. Those who could,

escaped to the nearby villages. After the soldiers left the area, people from Burqa visited Ogoljo only to find a heap of corpses left scattered in the fields and the ashes of their burnt dwellings. While they rambled among the corpses, they came across two babies crying under the bodies of their fallen mothers. They took them to Burqa, and a senior old man, Waqo, adopted them. With the help of the Oromo in Burqa, Anole and Hawani attended school. The villagers' plan, initiated by Waqo—who in his struggle against Menelik's army understands the importance of education— is to make them future leaders of the Oromo struggle against the Amhara administration. The story about the true identity of Anole and Hawani is revealed to the reader bit by bit until it is fully told at the end of Chapter 5 upon Waqo's death. This narrative delay creates suspense, though Waqo may also have another reason, which he never mentions to anyone, that is, his concern for children's state of mind: if he told this horrible story about the death of their parents, Hawani and Anole would not properly attend to their studies.

Waqo names the baby boy Anole, and the girl Hawani. Their names carry political implications, as the narrator explicitly tells us: Anole is named in memory of the historic battlefield of Anole in Arsi province, not far from Burqa, but Halwani's name does not reflect such a historical memory. Most of what Anole says in the novel symbolises and reflects the trauma that the Oromo underwent after their defeat on this battle. He believes that Oromo nationalism was forcibly destroyed by Menelik, and that therefore to revive it again the Oromo should take up similar forceful actions and make themselves free. Anole is often hot-tempered and advocates revenge against the *neftenyas* and their supporters. He also remembers the gruesome narratives of his foster father and is more mindful of the people of Burqa than Hawani, who instead talks about Ethiopia and the Oromo in general.

Anole's name raises the question that, if Anole is a survivor of the Ogoljo Massacre, why is he named after the Anole battlefield and not Ogoljo, the actual place where he

was born? This question cannot be answered only by the evidence within the text, for it concerns the overall political and historical scenario of the relationship between the Oromo and the Amhara expansionists. In this context, through contextual narratology, the historical background about Anole battlefield helps us understand the question of Anole's name. In the Oromo historical collective memory, Anole is the most memorable place, because it was where they were defeated and subjected to traumatic abuses and harassment. As I mentioned earlier, the brutality followed the Oromo's defeat that Menelik's force committed, including the amputation of limbs and breasts, made Anole more painful—and significant—to Waqo than Ogoljo. The significance given to Anole is narratively marked through the frequency, where Anole mentioned more times than Ogoljo.

As I have mentioned earlier, the Oromo history of war with Menelik's force and the subsequent history of oppression are presented in tandem with Waqo, Anole and Hawani's personal history and political experiences. That history is incorporated through personal memories of Waqo and collective memories of the Oromo in the Arsi province as narrated by Waqo. Waqo is not present in the novel, but rather his stories are focalized by Anole and sometimes by an extradiegetic narrator. He is known among the people of Burqa for his narratives about the war between the Oromo and Menelik and the Oromo's subsequent oppressions. In the next section, I turn to the historical themes presented by Anole and Hawani, and how their strategies of constructing, narrating, or writing history challenge the historiography of the Great Tradition.

1.4 Challenging the history of the Great Tradition by storying oral history

As mentioned in the previous section, Anole Waqo is an advocate of oral history. In most cases, he acts as a focalizor of oral history and war memories of his foster father, Waqo, a connoisseur of the Oromo oral history. The narrator tells us that Anole usually remembers the historical oral narratives of his father. In most cases, as I will show, Anole reiterates the narratives in his mind without speaking them out; rather, it is Waqo's words that we hear, enclosed in the quotation marks. Therefore, though apparently monologic, these oral narratives are internally dialogized: Anole stylizes Waqo's narrative, not his own, but the narrative creates a dialogue in his mind. In other words, Waqo's quoted speeches become double-voiced discourses and serve the purpose of at least two characters, Waqo and Anole. Not only does internal dialogism characterize Anole's oral historical memories, but there are also instances of other forms of dialogism (stylization and parody) that manifested through dialogues between Anole and other characters.[67]

Anole presents vast historical themes, and I focus on some of the most relevant to my discussion. Early in Chapter 1, as I have mentioned earlier, the historical themes start to surface through dialogues among the characters. When Anole's friend Jibril asks him about causes of the conflict in Burqa and the reason why the farmers mention Anole, Hawani, and Waqo's names in their protest songs, Anole refers to two oral stories (the story of Burqa's silence[68] and that of Burqa's prophecy) as the causes of the conflict (for

---

[67] For discussion on different forms of dialogism, see Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov (1994), Bakhtin (1981) and Kim (1999).

[68] The story as told by Waqo: 'This river, during an ancient time of our fathers, used to be known as 'Burqa'. Its source is from this fertile land of Burqa village, and it satisfies the Oromo soil with its water. Burqa flows throughout the borders of the Oromo land. It is a crystal clean water and runs swiftly. The Oromo used to drink from this river, wash their clothes and cook by the water from it. When the Oromo feel sick, they used to drink from Burqa and get healed.

further discussion of the stories, see Ch.4). The narrator tells us that Waqo has long been narrating these two stories in order to mobilize Oromo youths against the Amhara administration. In his response to Jibril, Anole highlights the historical background and the political undertone of the conflict: 'the farmers' question that made them revolt has political undertones. It is about ethnic-based oppression. They need the Amhara to leave their land. They harbour vindictive feelings towards them' (YZ 30). Anole himself confirms that the fundamental cause of the conflict was Menelik's expansionist war, which is presented in the story of Burqa's silence. What is crucial for us in Anole's discussion is that the political question is deeply rooted in oral history, handed down to the new generation in the form of oral stories. The immediate cause of the conflict is Burqa's prophecy,[69] which is expected to be realised following the death of Waqo, who falls sick and feared to pass away soon. According to the prophecy, when Waqo dies, the time will be ripe for the Oromo to launch a war on the Amhara settlers and they will succeed, causing the Burqa River to start flowing overground again.

The story does not stop here! Do you think it stops only here? Of course not!
When Burqa runs throughout the Oromo land, as it collides with rocks, it produces a sweet musical voice. When it jumps throughout the valleys, it teaches the Oromo the art of heroism, but it sends terror and panic to their enemies. When it slowly flows over the plain, the children play with it. And then they ask it to tell them stories. Burqa also tells the children the stories about the valleys it jumps over, the fields it flows through, the gorges it passes through and about the Oromos who live in the remote lands.
Ah, what could be done?
The Oromo's land was taken away by the *neftenya's* forces. This event enrages Burqa and it shrinks itself under the ground like a panther. Burqa vows that until the Oromo fight for their rights and regain their self-respect, I never come out from the womb of the earth. Consequently, it turns poisonous and sickens a person who tastes it, cuts their entrails and eventually kills them. Then after, the people have labelled it '*Bishaan Seexan'* (Devil's water). However, Burqa is ashamed of and saddened by the defeat of the Oromo people and hides itself under the ground' (pp. 32-3).

[69] 'Waqo! Waqo! This generation is unable to regain their dignity. My silence also continues. The very day you pass away, the Oromo anger re-erupts and trembles the earth. The youngsters lead one another and prove their heroism. That day, I raise my head. The Oromo enjoy my music. They learn my heroism. They inherit it. They listen to my stories' (p. 33).

The Oromo oral tradition and the folk tales above are important for Waqo, Anole and the Oromo in Burqa village. However, for the mainstream Derg officials, this oral history and the Oromo world views are meaningless and irrelevant. For example, the security minister of the Derg government reporting on Burqa's conflict to President Mengistu negatively describes the non-literate Oromo and their oral tradition. The Oromo in Burqa, according to him, 'refused to be organized under the kebele[70] administration. They are the **barbarians** who still govern themselves through their **traditional system**'[71] (p.19). He adds that 'in Burqa village, there is not one educated person. The peasants have no radio. It is the **nightmare** of the **sorcerers** that has made them to behave violently' [72](p.21, emphasis mine). Burqa farmers are described as 'barbarians' only for their allegiance to their traditional system of life; their oral tradition is ridiculed as a 'nightmare', and their experts of oral tradition as 'sorcerers'. This is an example of how the oral culture of the marginalized people downplayed by the proponents of the Ethiopian Great Tradition.

During the conversation, the minister speculates on the causes behind the conflict, but is convinced that it is not a political one because the people have no modern education, no access to media like radio, and live a traditional life, therefore they are free from 'politics'. The minister's words demean the Oromo farmers by calling them people who never love good things, quoting Mengistu's own words, who once told this very minister: 'if they prefer their dirty way of life to our better administration, leave them alone.'[73] These are caustic remarks about the indigenous way of life of the Oromo in Burqa village. He derogatively labels their causes, requests, and way of life as 'dirty or useless'. The remarks of these officials implicitly allude that politics and literacy are

[70] Kebele, in Amharic, is a small administrative unit in Ethiopia practised during the Derg era.
[71] የቀበሌ አስተዳደር ለማዋቀር ተሞክሮ አሻፈረኝ ብለዉ በራሳቸዉ ባህላዊ ስርዓት በመተዳደር ላይ ያሉ አረመኔዎች ናቸው።
[72] "ቡርቃ ላይ አንድም የተማረ ሰዉ የለም። ገበሬዎች ሬድዮ የላቸውም። የጠንቋዋዮች ቅዠት ነው ለዚህ ያበቃቸዉ።
[73] ወርቅ ሲነጠፍላቸው ፋንዲያ ይሻለናል ካሉ ተዋቸው" ብለሄን ነበር(19)።

interrelated—where there is literacy, there is a higher probability of political conflict. By implication, the words of the officials indicate how the indigenous knowledge system and oral history are discredited by the mainstream Ethiopianist Derg officials.

The minister's report is dialogic in several ways. First, it is a rejoinder to Oromo oral history, since he parodies and manipulates the views of Burqa's farmers according to his own understanding of non-literate peoples. Second, it anticipates the president's reaction and is part of a dialogue in which they discuss how to deal with the conflict. Anole's response to Jibril is also dialogic, indirectly responding to the minister's interpretation of the causes of Burqa's conflict and to Mengistu's remarks about, and his response places him on an oppositional dialogic relationship. In other words, the dialogic nature of Anole's utterance indicates that Anole is resisting the officials' views about the Oromo, though he cannot say this explicitly. Anole and the Derg officials have not met in person in this context, and they do not know even what each of them thinks about this conflict. The power hierarchy between them means that they are not in an equal position to discuss this matter with Anole. The novel maintains this distance, but uses dialogism, particularly parody, to place them on the same discursive plane, with each competing interpretations or views about the conflict and its historical and political aspects.

Further historical themes are discussed in the novel following Waqo's death. As he realises that he is about to die, Waqo informs the villagers that he wants to see Anole and Hawani before he dies. As a result, three elders are sent to Addis Ababa to tell Anole that his adoptive father is about to die and that the farmers are about to dislodge the Amhara. Upon their arrival in the capital, the elders are detained by Derg security forces until the government decides to send them back to Burqa with Anole. Anole's inquiry about what happened to them while in detention takes us to Anole's first attack of the history of the Great Tradition. Their conversation is presented in the form of a dialogue between Anole and Abba Boru, the most senior elder. Throughout this

dialogue and Anole's rhetorical questions, important aspects of the history of the Great Tradition are brought up for discussion:

> 'Did they beat you up while you were in the prison?', Anole asks Abba Boru.
> 'No, they insulted us…my son!'
> 'Who was insulting you?'
> 'It has been a long time.'
> 'What is that, Abba Boru?'
> 'The insults!'
> 'Abba Boru'
> 'My son!'
> 'What was the insult?'
> 'They called me ... a stupid 'Galla'![74]

[Anoles fumes and asks for the specific person who said so. Abba Boru does not mention their but continues saying what the person said to them.]
'They mocked us, saying "you are not better than the donkeys you are driving".'
'And he also asked us for fun, "when will you get civilized?", Abba Boru adds.
'So what did you reply, Abba Boru?'
'I asked back, "Who is ruling over us that we get civilized while you yourself are uncivilized?"'[75]

At the end, Abba Boru mentions a proverb that the prison worker uses after his retort.[76] The proverb implies that the Oromo elders attempt to criticize the Amhara administration without a capacity to do so. Anole's bitter reaction to the proverb contextualizes the incident within the history of Amhara domination. He uses the incident to question the overall world view of the Amhara and to contest the antiquity of the history of the Great Tradition:

---

[74] 'እስር ቤት ውስጥ ደበደቡዋችሁ እንዴ?'
'ሰደቡን እንጅ አልነኩንም... ልጄ!'
'ማነው ተሳዳቢው!'
'ቆየ እኮ ልጄ?'
'ምኑ አባቦሩ?'
'ስድቡ ከተጀመረ ነዋ?'
'አባቦሩ!'
'የኔ ልጅ!'
ምን ብለዉ ሰደቡዋችሁ!?
'እኔን...'ጅል ጋላ!' አሉኝ።' (52)

[75]' ከሚትነዱዋቸው አህዮች አሻሉም! ሲሉም አላገጡብን።'
'መቼ ይሆን የምሰለጥኑት? ሲሉም ጠየቁን።'
'እርሶ ታዲያ ምን መለሱለት አባቦሩ!?'
'ማን እየገዛን እንሰልጥን? አልኩት።'

[76] 'ሲሉ ሰምታ ዶሮ ታንቃ ሞተች አሉና ተረቱብን።' (52)

> As far as telling tales is concerned, who is better than them? Their life itself is a tale. Their thinking is a tale. Like older women, they know nothing better than telling tales. Stupid! How ridiculous! Who are they to call themselves civilized? What do they think they did for this country? They boast that they have a civilization three thousand years old, but they have wasted all those years preparing wine and drinking it. [77]

The prison guards call the Oromo elders *Galla*, a word that demonstrates their lack of respect. Abba Boru does not immediately mention the insulting word, rather he wants Anole to know that the insults started a long time ago (see dialogue above): this alludes to the historical issues that the novel is about to present through these characters. The attempt of the Great Tradition to present non-Amhara peoples as 'uncivilized' is brought into the discussion through this dialogic interaction, in which historical attitudes are questioned. The guards tell the three elders that they are 'uncivilized' and 'backward', as the analogy with the donkey also shows. In response, Abba Boru argues that the Amhara ruling class are the real obstacle for the people they rule over to remain 'uncivilized', if they are really so. Anole goes even further and questions one of the main tenets of the Great Tradition, the supposed '3000-year history'. He tells the elders that the Amhara had no civilization to be boast of. He dubs it an 'old-women's tale', a self-made fiction. As contextual narratologists tell us, this observation reflects the influence of the extratextual context on the novelistic narrative, since this key tenet of the Great Tradition had already been questioned by the Eritrean and the Oromo liberation fronts in the early 1970s (Marzagora 2017). Anole's questions, then, echo views raised by proponents of counter-hegemonic narratives. This adds to my earlier claim that Anole is a proponent of the 'colonial thesis', though he is not a mouthpiece of any political party. As Anole himself states later in Chapter 9, he is not a member of the

[77] 'ለተረትማ ማን ብሎአቸው? ኑሮአቸው ተረት ነው። አስተሳሰባቸውም ተረት ነዉ። እንደ ባልተት ተረት ከማዉራት የተሻለ ምን ያውቃሉ? ደደቦች! እነሱን ብሎ ድሞ ስልጡን? ለዚህች ሀገር ምን ቁምነገር የፈየዱ መሰላቸው? ሶስት ሺህ እያሉ የሚመኩበት ዘመን ሙሉ ጠጅ በመጣልና በመጠጣት ነው ጊዜያቸዉን የፈጁት!'(52-53)

OLF. This is an indication that the author prefers to distance his characters so as not to make them mouthpieces of political groups.

In a separate passage, while reiterating how destructive Emperor Menelik and his force had been during the war of expansion, Anole questions if such deeds can be called heroism. He does not voice these thoughts to anybody; rather, he meditates on the narratives about Menelik he had heard from Waqo as he travels back to Addis Ababa from Burqa after settling the conflict in Burqa. The extradiegetic narrator tells us that as Anole is leaving Burqa, he recalls the people he met there, his old friends and the three elders he recently travelled with from Addis Ababa. One of Abba Boru's statements crosses his mind and makes him smile. The day they travelled to Burqa, Abba Boru told him, 'Not just the earth, the sky [above the Oromo land] also belongs to the Oromo'.[78] Recalling those words, Anole now puts out his neck out of the car window and looks up at the sky. As he admires the natural resources and pleasant weather of the Oromo lands, the story that Waqo used to tell him comes to mind. The story is focalized through Anole's thoughts until the driver wakes him up from his meditations:

> Menelik destroyed the *Gadaa* system.[79] He massacred all the Oromo rulers and their people. He imposed on us a system which is alien to our culture and incompatible with our growth, and he destroyed our culture. He destroyed our humanity. His soldiers rode on us as on their donkeys. They took our land. The Oromo people became slaves to the *neftenya*. To each *neftenya* soldier, 200 Oromos along with their lands were given as a reward for their contribution to the war. They worked to destroy the Oromo language and culture. Any Oromo who opposed this threat was mutilated. They pulled out our nails, cut off our genitals and shamed us. They humiliated those proud people. They turned those honest people into sceptics. They

[78]' እንኳዋን መሬቱ ሰማዩም የኦሮሞች ነው።' (53)

[79]According to Taddesse (2012:54-55) '*Gadaa* is an age-grade system that divides the stages of life of individuals, from childhood to old age, into a series of formal steps. There are thirteen such steps in contemporary Guji society [one of the Oromo groups]. Transition ceremonies mark the passage from one stage to the next. Within each stage, activities and social roles are formally defined, both in terms of what is permitted and what is forbidden. The ideal length of time in one rank is eight years'.

> exploited those fertile lands. So, my people, who is Menelik, after all? A criminal or a patriot? [80]

This narrative presents the damage that Menelik wrought on the socio-cultural institutions, culture and language of the Oromo; the exploitation of human and natural resources; maladministration and inhumane treatment; the psychological impact of the occupation on the victims. And finally, it contests the status and image of Emperor Menelik as a heroic king. The character-focalizor leaves the reader to answer whether Menelik should be hailed as a hero/ patriot or condemned as a criminal but amasses enough accusations so that the reader does not find it difficult to decide. By exposing the crimes committed by Menelik, the novel questions the national-hero status of Menelik, and to do this it draws on internal dialogism, where Anole stylizes his father's words. This is further enhanced/ intensified through the use of the rhetoric questions. A myriad of ideas run through Anole's mind, and he ends up thinking about Amhara religious practices, one core aspect of the Great Tradition which is usually presented as a symbol of civilization and is used by the Amhara elites to represent themselves as superior to the other peoples of Ethiopia. Waqo had observed the double standards in their religious practice when he told Anole that, 'they cut off the breasts of our women… When they slaughter sheep, they pray in the name of God the Father… But when they amputate the breasts of our women, they never say any prayer. Yet they claim that they have a religion.'[81] It is a rejoinder to the historical incident at Anole, and this is done by exposing the double standard or paradox in their religious practices.

The brutality of Menelik and his military personnel is also presented in the context of another community, the Kaffa people, a minority ethnic group living in southern

---

[80] 'ምንልክ የገዳዉን ስርዓት አጠፋሁ። የኦሮሞ ሹማምንትና ኦሮሞዎችን ጨፈጨፈ። የኦሮሞ ያልሆኔና ለእድገት የማይበጅ፤ ባህላችንን የሚያጠፋ ስርዓት ጫነብን። ሰበናችን ላይ ዘመተብን።ወታዴሮቻቸዉ እንደ በቅሎ ተፈናጠጡን_ መሬታችንን ወሰዱ_የኦሮሞ ህዝብ የነፍጠኞች አሽከር ሆነ_ለአንድ የነፍኛ ጦር መሪ ሁለት መቶ ኦሮሞ በሽልማት ተሰጠ_ከነመሬታቸው። የኦሮሞ ቁዋንቁዋና ባህል እንድጠፋ ተረባረቡ _ ይህን የተቃመ ሁሉ እንደ ዝንብ ረገፈ_ጥፍር እየነቀሉ፣ ብልት እየቆረጡ አዋረዱን_ያን ጀገና ህዝብ አንገቱን አስደፉት _ ያን ቅን ህዝብ ተጠራጣሪ አደረጉት_ያን ሀብታም መድር በዘበዙት። ወገኖቼ፤ ታዲያ ምንልክ ማነው? ወንጀለኛ ወይስ አርበኛ?' (92)

[81] የሰቶቻችን ጡት ቆረጡት ....እነዚህ ሰዎች በግ ሲያርዱ'በስመ _አብ ብለው ይጀምራሉ። የሴቶቻችን ጡት ሲቆርጡ ግን በስመ አብ አይሉም። ግን ሃይማኖት አለን ይሉናል። (93፣94)

Ethiopia, who under their king Gaki Sharecho strenuously resisted Menelik's invasion. Once again, we come to know this Waqo's narrative, through Anole's memory acting as focalizor, and in the novel works as an example that shows the novel does not advocate only the Oromo political and historical concerns as assumed by some Amhara activists:

> The Kaffa people refused to pay Menelik tributes and taxes. When they fought for their cause, we were unable even to show our solidarity, let alone go to the battlefield with them. The Kaffa people were murdered across all the mountains in the Kaffa lands. But people never perish completely. Their country was destroyed. Their huts were burnt down. Their leader Gaki Sharecho fought relentlessly for one year. Then he was tired and gave up. He was hounded like a criminal. Today his name is forgotten. Was Gaki a bandit? What about *Ras* Birru? *Ras* Birru had a huge amount of land in Arsi. Today, however, *Ras* Birru is considered a patriot…but Gaki is a bandit, and we are the slaves….[82]

Before Menelik's arrival, the Kaffa had their own leaders, like the Oromo. They resisted but were eventually crushed and enslaved. As the homodiegetic narrator reports, Waqo regrets the inability of the Oromo to collaborate with the Kaffa. In so doing, the novel highlights, the absence of solidarity among the occupied peoples. In view of contextual narratology and taking into consideration the historical context of Waqo's points, Waqo becomes unreliable narrator as it seems unlikely that such a collaboration would have been historically possible in view of the distance between Burqa and the Kaffa land. This is therefore a retrospective fiction used to forge possible solidarities. At the end, Waqo comes to the point that lies at the core of Ethiopian national historiography, the representation of the occupied peoples and their leaders compared to that of the leaders that led the war of expansion. Waqo's question about how history represents the two groups highlights the position from which Ethiopian history is narrated. As Semir Yusuf (2009) argues, since this history is narrated from the Amhara perspective, the people they occupied are represented as the 'other' in an oppositional historical relation.

[82]'የካፋ ህዝብ ለምንልክ አልገብርም ብሎ ሲፋለም እኛ ለማገዝ ቀርቶ አይዞህ ለማለት አቅም አልነበረንም። ህዝቡ አለቀ _በየተራራው። ግን ሰው ሞቶ አያልቅም።አገሩ ወደመ። ጎጆ ጋየ። የካፋዉ ጋኪ ሻረቾ አንድ አመት ሙሉ ሳይንበረከክ ተፋለመ። ከዚያ አልቻለም። እንደ ወንጀለኛ ተዋረደ። ዛሬ የጋኪ ስም ተረስቶዋል። ጋኪ ሽፍታ ነው? ራስ ብሩስ? ራስ ብሩ አርሲ ላይ ከአስራ አምስት ሽህ ጋሻ በላይ መሬት ነበረው። ዛሬ ግን ራስ ብሩ አርበኛ... ጋኪ ሽፍታ... እኛ ደግሞ አሽከሮጭ...'(99).

The Kaffa, like the Oromo and Walayitta, are asked to celebrate this 'glorious past'. But that past cannot be 'glorious' for the Kaffa and the Oromo, or for many other peoples in southern Ethiopia, as many nationalist groups in Ethiopia argue.

Even though the history of the Great Tradition is widely criticised by Waqo and Anole, the novel does not only promote counter hegemonic narratives and question the Great Tradition alone. It also challenges Waqo's claim and criticism by putting them in dialogic interaction with the perspectives of the Amhara characters. In other words, *Yeburqa Zimita* does not silence the Ethiopian Great Tradition altogether. The case of Asnaqe, an Amhara character who led the Amhara force during the conflict in Burqa, is a good example. In Chapter 2, the very day the Oromo gather at Waqo's home before they begin fighting, the Amhara also gather in front of St. Gebreal Church on a hill a few kilometres away from the village. A priest opens the meeting with a blessing and tells the Amhara fighters that God will be on their side on their war with the Oromo. This highlights the involvement of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in politics and its support of Amhara nationalism. The priest then orders them to select a war leader: accordingly, Asnaqe, a former teacher who is now a businessman, is selected. Asnaqe then gives a motivational speech, in which he expresses his happiness at being selected to lead the armed forces and exalts Amhara supremacy. In his speech he defends the *neftenya* system and accuses the Oromo of ingratitude for seeking revenge against the Amhara. Two points in his speech are worth noting. First, Asnaqe argues that the Oromo are ungrateful in blaming *Ras* Birru, Menelik's war leader in Arsi province, for they forget his good works. 'Who said that we should be responsible for Birru's crimes?[83] Second, the Oromo are ungrateful in not thanking the Amhara for civilising them by teaching them how to eat chicken and many other dishes, and for building schools and roads. Therefore, according to Asnaqe, the Amhara do not deserve to be

[83] 'የራስ ብሩ ጥፋት በኛ ላይ መላካክ አለበት ያላዉስ ማነው?' (61)

blamed or punished. And if need be, the Amhara can show their might once again in a way that will make the Oromo silent for the next fifty years. He adds that the Amhara's contributions to Ethiopian civilisation is peerless, and that being Amhara is an identity to be proud of:

> If we only consider what Emperor Menelik and Emperor Haile Sellassie have done, we understand that only the Amhara have sacrificed themselves for Ethiopian civilization. The Amhara are knowledgeable. They are the mightiest of all. They are proud of their Ethiopian identity. Being Amhara is itself a thing of beauty, it is an identity to be proud of. Wherever you are in the world, the Amhara are dependable people. They are heroes. Both in America and Europe, there are Amharas who outperform the whites because of their unsurpassed brilliance. Here at Addis Ababa University, the Amhara are the backbone of the university.[84]

Asnaqe is a minor character and only appears in this one scene; however, his narrative is powerful and a strong dialogic response to Waqo's narratives presented over the five chapters of the novel. The points that Asnaqe raises are key to the history of the Great Tradition. Though Asnaqe does not mention Waqo's name, his speech dialogically opposes him as he calls the Oromo as ungrateful. Once again, indirect dialogism is used here to connect the narratives of the Great Tradition and counter-hegemonic narratives by juxtaposing them side by side each other without really creating a dialogue between the characters advocating for different narratives and hostile to each other. This incident indicates the novel is polyphonic, but it leans towards the counter-narratives. Anole is critical of the history of the Great Tradition not only when he meets his Oromo friends, but does not compromise his stance towards the Amhara cultural and political domination also with non-Oromo friends whenever the topics crop up. However, these scenes are different because Anole engages in active dialogic interaction and is

[84] አጼ ምንልክን አጼ ሃይለስላሴ የሰሩትን ብቻ እንኩዋ ብናይ የኢትዮጵያ ስልጣኔ የአማራ ብቸኛ ድካም ማሆኑን እንገነዘባሌን። አማራ አዋቂ ነዉ። ሃያል ነው። በኢትዮጵያነቱ የሚኮራ ህዝብ ነው። አማራነት ውበት ሰለሆነ ልንመካበት ይገባል። በየትም አመት የሚያስመካ ብሄር ነው_አማራ። አማራ ማለት ጀግና ማለት ነው። በአሜርካ በአዉሮፓ በችሎታቸው ነጮችን ዘቅዝቀው የሚያዩ አማራዎች አሉ። እዚሁ አዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲም ህዱ...የዩኒቨርሲቲው ሞተሮች አማሮች ናቸው። (81)

challenged, at least in some cases, and required to justify his position against the Great Tradition.

Three scenes where Anole meets three young non-Oromo women can be mentioned. With two of them, Zenith, his high school friend, and Rosa, an Eritrean spy, he criticises the conversion of Oromo personal and place names into Amhara names. The conversation with Zenith, an old high school friend, begins memories of their high school life. Zenith reflects the influence of the ideology of the Great Tradition in that, for example, she does not like Anole's Oromo name, and does not address the Oromo town she lives in by its original name. To Anole's dismay, at one point she tells Anole that had she known his name before she knew him, she would have never befriended with him because she hates his name. She even asks him to change his name, and addresses him with an Amhara name, Alex. Anole objects to her use and tells her bluntly that he will never change his name. In this context, the practice of name changing is presented as part of a simple daily conversation, showing how the practice is normalized. Anole challenges such a normalization when he refuses to be addressed even in a friendly way by his old schoolmate and tells her off for changing his name.

The idea of name changing is further discussed by Anole in a more political tone in Asmara, where he is conducting a political mission mandated to him by the Derg. Through his Eritrean friend in Addis Ababa (who, unknown to Anole is a secret agent of the EPLF), Anole meets Rosa, another EPLF spy. As soon as they meet, Rosa addresses him as Finfinne, something Anole finds strange but is impressed by. Finfinne is actually the code name for Anole used by the Eritrean secret agents living in Addis Ababa, but Anole does not know it. However, this name is significant to Anole as the historical name for Addis Ababa before it was changed by the Amhara aggressors. Rosa

knows that and uses it to build trust with Anole for her future political mission.[85] Her question about it prompts Anole to express his stance on Amhara domination.

The third scene is between Anole and Yodit, his Asmara girlfriend who is studying law at Addis Ababa University. A few days before he leaves for Asmara they meet, and Anole indicates that he wants to end their relationship. The cause for this is her father's views and attitude when Anole visited their home. When Yoditi's father hears the name Anole, the narrator tells us, Anole saw his facial expression change and concluded that this Amhara man hates the Oromo. Anole now tells Yodit that her father is unhappy about him. He also discusses with her father's views: his appreciation for Amhara supremacy and Amhara emperors and his scorn towards those non-Amhara who are critical of them. According to Anole, Yodit's father believes Emperor Menelik was appointed by God to save Ethiopia and that no one should oppose him. Anole compares Yodit's father to the Amhara monk, Abba Bahrey, who wrote about the Oromo in the 16th century demonizing them and addressing them with derogatory names. Yodit does not know Bahrey and asks Anole to explain.[86] He replies:

> Don't you know Bahrey? It is good that you don't know him. He is a *debtera.*[87] In his writing about the Oromo in Geez, he writes, 'I have started writing about the [Oromo] to let you know their history, the number of their tribes, their impulsiveness to take life, their cruelty and bad tradition. I do not want to tell you about them other than this: they won't help you in anything'. Your father shares Bahrey's views.[88]

Anole tells her that her father said to him, 'God sent Menelik to unite Ethiopia', and goes on: 'The implication of his words is evident, Yodit. The king sent by the Lord is

---

[85] This information is not explicitly presented in the novel; however, contextual narratology draws attention to the overall context around this conversation.

[86] Abbaa Bahrey was an Amhara monk, who lived in southern Ethiopia in the 16th century and the first Amhara person to negatively portray the Oromo and addressed them by the name that the Oromo have never addressed themselves (Jeylan 2006; Mohammed 2012).

[87] A cleric, with attributes of learning, astrology and intrigue.

[88] 'ባህሬይን አታዉቅም? ለነገሩ ባታዉቂው ይሻልሻል።አንድ ደብተራ ነው። ስለ ኦሮሞ በግዕዝ ያሰፈረው ጽሁፍ 'የጋላ ታሪክ፣ የነገዳቸዉ ቁጥር፣ ነፍሳትን ለመግደል ያላቸው አራባጅነትና የጭካኔ መጥፎ ልማዳቸዉን ለማሳዎቅ የጋላን ታሪክ ጀምሬያለሁ። ... ከዚያ ወዲያ ያለውን ተይው። ምንም አያደርግልሽ። አባትሽ ከዚያ ባህር የተቀዱ ሰው ናቸው።' (151)

absolutely perfect and you must accept him. But God is impartial. Your father is not different from Bahrey' (152-3).[89] Therefore, Anole decides not to relate to him regardless of Yodit's insistence. When Yodit challenges him saying that her father's attitude toward Menelik should not determine their relationship and concludes that this is only a pretext Anole is using to end the relationship. For Yodit the history that Anole tells her is not an important topic. Such dismissal of historical concerns is notable also in contemporary arguments by Amhara elites about Oromo concern over historical representation. Some Amhara elites argue that all the allegations against the emperors are fictions invented by the Oromo nationalists for political purposes, the point that the Oromo consider the grave denial of their political and historical concerns.

Anole's strong historical consciousness is evident in one final episode, in the last section of the third part of the novel, when the conflict in Burqa breaks out and Hayelom's force arrive to intervene. Anole is a participant in the conflict and is providing the farmers with firearms. Hayelom's force besieges Anole on Abba Bokku Hill, but Hayelom does not want Anole to die as he already knows about him through Hawani. Therefore, he first sends the mediators, including Anole's Eritrean friend, Abraha Tselot, and when Anole declines his request, he writes Anole a letter explaining that the TPLF's mission is to liberate all the Ethiopian peoples and that he wants Anole to witness this before he dies. The historical theme crops up here again, in relation to the hill on which Anole is based, the same hill on which Abba Bokku, as I have mentioned earlier, was killed. Whereas Hayelom mentions in his letter that 'history has not repeated itself' as he asks Anole to leave the hill peacefully, Anole, in the diary he means to leave for Hawani, states that 'history is going to repeat itself on this hill'. However, the 'new *neftenyas* are different from the older *neftenyas'* because they ask him twice peacefully to leave before

[89] 'እግዚአብሄር ኢትዮጵያን አንድ ለማድረግ ምንልክን ላከ'የብህላቸው ትርጓሜ ስዉር አይደለም፤ ዮዲጥ የሰው ልጅ ሁሉ ጌታ የሆነው እግዛብሄር የላከው ገዢ ፍጹማዊ ነዉና አሜን ብላችሁ ተቀበሉ ማለታቸው ነው። በዚህ እምነታቸው አባትሽ ከባህሬይ በምን ይሌያሉ?' (152)

they take action. The diary ends here, and we learn in the epilogue that Anole escapes to Eritrea through Hayelom's help and settles in Asmara.

Convinced by Hayelom's letter, Anole attentively follows the TPLF political response to Oromo demands. Eventually, he tells us in the epilogue, Hayelom is also killed over simple personal conflict., and Anole realises that what Hayelom wrote to him was only his personal belief, not that of the TPLF. Hayelom was a good person, but not a political, and the TPLF's administration is rather like George Orwell's, *Animal Farm*, with every promise made by Hayelom and the early TPLF fighters reversed and the TPLF becoming a dictatorship like the Derg regime before them. In this vein, Hayelom's death symbolises the death of democracy and justice under the TPLF's administration. In short, if Anole's character introduces the importance of oral history and historical consciousness to Oromo subjects, and also their intransigence in defending historical concerns in the face of Amhara indifference or hostility, Hawani's trajectory shows the limitation of mainstream history writing followed by Ethiopianist scholars.

1.5 Hayelom's biography or TPLF history? The impossibility of a mainstream approach to writing history

The second strategy that *Yeburqa Zimita* uses to contest the history of the Great Tradition is by showing the challenge that a historian, Hawani Waqo, faces when she applies the mainstream approach of history writing to the personal history of Hayelom along with that of the TPLF, a party that does not accept such individual-centred historical representation. Hawani, first briefly introduced in the prologue and later as Anole's fiancée, comes into her own in Chapter 2, when, after spending a year in prison in Gondar arbitrarily indicted by the Derg regime, she decides to migrate to Europe. When she sets out towards Sudan, she gets the idea of writing a biography of the TPLF guerrilla fighter, Commander Hayelom Araya, who is admired for his personal integrity and extraordinary military tactics. Herself captured by Hayelom's force, she is

able to meet him, and when Hayelom mentions that she can join his force and get first hand data about him, she changes her mind and decides to follow him.

Hawani's decision to write history in the form of a biography is/seems directly inspired by the historiography she was taught at university which, as we have seen, centred on emperors and leaders. But the very first day Hawani meets one of the TPLF's higher officials, Aboy Sibhat, Hayelom's friend, in the Desert of Tigray, a contradiction with her plan of history writing is revealed. Sibhat asks Hayelom why Hawani is following them, and he responds that 'she came to write the history of the TPLF's struggle'.[90] This response is at variance with Hawani's plan, which is actually to write Hayelom's biography, not the history of the TPLF. Hayelom tells Hawani that his party does not allow an approach to history writing that centred on a single person and criticizes the way the Adwa victory over the Italian in 1896 is presented as the achievement of Emperor Menelik without acknowledging the contributions of the Ethiopian peoples who fought the war. Hawani should not repeat the same mistake.

The impossibility of the hero-centred history writing that Hawani is familiar with in her history courses at Addis Ababa University is demonstrated over the course of narrative development, from the time Hawani joins the TPLF until the epilogue, when she is still thinking about writing a book. At first, despite Hayelom and his friends' resistance, Hawani continues to gather data about Hayelom and the major military operations in which he participated. Her own dissatisfaction with biographical history writing begins early in the novel (in Ch. 2) when she destroys her first draft of Hayelom's biography. This feeling is exacerbated by the Derg's brutality towards Tigrayan civilians, especially during one incident in which Hawani is also wounded and several Tigrayan school children are murdered. The incident enrages her and forces her to join armed struggle. This experience, and the TPLF's advice that Hawani should think beyond biography

[90] 'የትግሉን ታሪክ ለመጻፍ ነው የመጣች።' (36)

writing and fight for the cause of her people, makes her drop the idea of writing Hayelom's biography, and history writing in general. Given Hawani's academic background in historical studies, the TPLF do not send Hawani to the battle front but assign her the task of documenting their war achievements. But Hawani is critical of the TPLF's approach to history documentation, that is, audio and video recording. For Hawani, writing is more durable and reliable than any other form of history preservation (for example, documentation):

> There have been so many nations who liberated themselves through an indomitable struggle. Though many were unable to see the results of their struggle, they have been able to achieve their goal through their purpose and the determination of their followers. Those whose history has been written, their heroism, their perseverance, and their role modelling are read throughout the world. If it is not written, it remains mere oral traditions. Whenever the struggles are undertaken between the liberation fighters and their oppressive governments or during the wars between the countries, a large number of the journalists and writers accompany the soldiers. At the end of the day, countless books with sweet stories flood over the world. Those books give a clear sense of the events for the later generations…. She [Hawani] believes that wartime events cannot be sufficiently preserved through video recording. Only books have an incomparable potential in preserving history. If there is a book, other things are easily produced. If there is no book, there is nothing there, however. Such books inspire and shape new generations.[91]

As we see here, Hawani's concern is not the perspective from which history is narrated, rather the modality through which history is documented. For the TPLF this is not an issue, rather they focus on the representation and the vantage point from where history is told. Hayelom and the TPLF do not want the history of their struggle to be written as Hayelom's personal history, but rather Hayelom should appear in their history as an individual. Hawani does not seem to understand this concern, and she repeatedly argues that Hayelom and the TPLF are one and the same, and that either mode of

[91]'በድል አድራጊነት አገራቸውን ነጻ ያወጡም አያሌ ናቸዉ። ድሉን ለማየት ባይበቁም በአላማቸዉና በተከታዮቻቸዉ በኩል ድልን የሚቀዳጁ አሉ። ታሪካቸዉ የተጻፈላቸዉ ዛሬ በድፍን አለም ጀግንነታቸዉ ደምቆ ይነበባል። ካልተፃፈ ግን አፈታሪክ ሆኖ ይቀራል። በሌሎች አገሮች በተካሄዱ የህዝብ ትግሎችም ሆነ የአገሮች ጦርነቶች አያሌ ጋዜጠኞችና ደራስያን ከተዋጊዎች ጋር አብረዉ ይዘምታሉ። ከፍፃሜ በሁዋላ ታዲያ ተነበዉ የማያልቁና የማይጠገቡመፅፍት አገር ምድሩን ያለብሱታል። እኒያ መፅሀፍትም አዲሱን ትዉልድ ያንፃሉ።' (117)

representation makes no difference. This is where the influence of the historiography of the Great Tradition is reflected in Hawani's thinking and she ruminates over this idea for a long time; even after she gives up writing Hayelom's biography, she is unable to convince herself to follow the TPLF's way of representation.

Hawani's political engagement and understanding of history are remarkably different from those of Anole. For one thing, for her, Waqo's stories are not a source of knowledge when it comes to interpreting mainstream Ethiopian historiography. She rarely takes recourse to the historical narratives she learned from Waqo, though she does resort to oral traditions to support written evidence or to fill a gap in the written records. Moreover, her connection to the Oromo people in general and to those in Burqa is not as strong as Anole's. Though she lives in Ethiopia most of her life, she does not visit Burqa except after the conflict there and the fall of the Derg government, and she never even refers to the story of Burqa's silence in her discussions and arguments about history with Hayelom.

There is only one important occasion on which she engages in an extensive historical discussion about the Oromo, when she gives a talk at a conference arranged by the EPRDF, a party she affiliates to, in 1991. By this time, she has become a member of a federalist political party thanks to the TPLF, who eventually formed a federalist government in 1991. Her interpretation of national history is thus informed by the ideology of this party. As mentioned earlier, the EPRDF adopted the 'national oppression thesis' (Marzagora 2017), and Hawani's understanding, and interpretation of Ethiopian history reflect this view. The title of her presentation is 'OPDO's perspectives on the neftenya system'. It is worth reiterating that Hawani presents the party's perspective on history rather than her own personal convictions, though she shares that perspective as a high-profile member of the party. While she is still

discussing the conference with Hayelom a few days before the conference begins, she remembers the Oromo folk song 'Hafe'[92] [No More], about the displacement and eviction of the Oromo from their land by Menelik's forces. It is worth quoting its last few lines, which can be related to the core of her talk:

> The year the enemy came
> Our cattle perished
> Since Meshesha came
> Our freedom vanished.[93]

In this part of the song, the concept of 'enemy' sets up a strong opposition between the community who shares the ideas of the song and those who the song addresses as the enemy. The occupation that the Great Tradition defends as a project of state formation is reversed and presented as the coming of the enemy. Meshesha is one of the war leaders who invaded the central part of the country, and his coming is presented as a disaster in which people lost their cattle and their freedom. Hawani's talk echoes this understanding, though the narrator tells us that Hawani can remember this folk song but does not sing it.

Hawani's wide-ranging talk runs over twelve pages (276-88). This is important on its own as its duration indicates how the narratively the novel makes the talk significant. Though it partly dwells on party policies, here I focus only on the core points relating to history. Hawani begins by introducing herself to the audience, saying she belongs to the Arsi Oromo who live in south-central Ethiopia—her audience in Wallaga are Oromos from western Ethiopia. This simple introductory remark carries ideological significance

---

[92] Hawani is introduced in chapter one as someone with a strong passion for poetry, and wherever she is, poetry follows.

[93] *Bara jarri dhufani*
Loon keenyas ni dhumanii;
Iddo Mashashaan dhufee
Birmadumanis hafe. (273)

and is worth pausing on. It underscores how the *neftenya* applied a policy of divide and rule by presenting the Oromo groups as different ethnic groups. In this perspective, the common Oromo identity was destroyed at the time of the occupation but was reframed only in the 1970s with the formation of the OLF. Against this background, Hawani introduces herself as someone from Arsi who nonetheless shares a common history and culture with her Wallaga audience. Arsi, as mentioned earlier, is one of the two important places in the Oromo struggle against the *neftenya.*

Another reason why Hawani orients herself spatially before her audience to Arsi is to take them to the alleged place of the origin of the Oromo. In the Oromo creation mythology, Madda Walabu, a place in Arsi, holds great significance as a historical memory. Though Hawani does not specifically mention this place, she starts her talk by saying that the Oromo used to live in the south-eastern regions of present-day Ethiopia before they expanded in different directions for socio-economic reasons. She tells her audience that though they live in different parts of the country and have different names in each region, the Oromo originate from the same ancestral lineage and were ruled under their own *Gadaa* system before the encroachment of the *neftenyas*. As far as the origin of the Oromo is concerned, the written evidence is in fact scanty and partly conflictual. Amhara elites reworked it to present the Oromo as foreigners who migrated to Ethiopia around the sixteenth century. It is perhaps for this reason that Hawani relies on the Oromo mythology orally handed down from older generations (YZ 276-88). In other words, she uses this myth to contest the written narratives about Oromo origin produced by Amhara clerks and monks and promoted by the narratives of the Great Tradition. History for Hawani is not just the written records, a point I shall return to.

Hawani uses this narrative of origin to challenge the *neftenya's* manipulation of collective Ethiopian identity for the sake of their ambitious assimilationist policy under the guise of Ethiopianism: 'If someone mentions the name of one's identity before

presenting oneself as an Ethiopian,' she explains, 'such a person is disparaged as 'narrow minded', 'ethno-centric' and 'local'' .[94] The Oromo, Hawani argues, do not have a culture of presenting themselves as superior to others or treating others as subordinates. She goes even further in attributing ethnocentrism to the *neftenya* system: 'the ethnic essentialism and ethnic-based oppression in the lands of eastern Africa is caused by the *neftenya* system'.[95] Unlike Anole and other characters in *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Yeburqa Zimita*, Hawani presents written evidence to substantiate her claim about the negative portrayal of the Oromo and other people in Ethiopianist scholarship and national history. She presents two examples: one is a dictionary by a *neftenya* lexicographer, Aleqa Kidane Wold Kifle (YZ 282) in which, Hawani says, the Oromo are presented as the enemy of the Amhara, and the Amhara should fight and kill them in order to save themselves. The other text she mentions is the Ethiopian Orthodox religious text *Raey Mariyam* (1968), which is about a dream by St. Mary that Jesus Christ interprets for her: she saw some souls falling on top of other souls; the falling souls are the Oromo, the Muslims, the Gumuz people and others. They are curse for a woman who has recently given birth to a baby, and Jesus in the text addresses them with offensive ethnic slurs (p. 284).[96]

Hawani argues that the Amhara put aside other sacred religious texts and fabricated a text which presents Jesus Christ as insulting the Oromo and other non-Amhara ethnic groups, in an attempt, Hawani explains, to present the son of God as their ally and to designate us as the heathens. This indicates, she concludes, how arrogant they are. In the previous section we saw Waqo levels similar criticism against Amhara religious practices that he finds self-contradictory. Therefore, Waqo and Hawani's speeches are

---

[94] ከኢትዮጵያዊነት በፊት የብሄረሰቡን ስም የሚያነሳውን ሁሉ 'ጠባብ፣ ጎጠኛ፣ ዘረኛ' የሚል ስያሜ ስለሚያከናንቡት ምክንያት ጭምር አብራራች። (279)

[95] በምንኖርበት በዚህች የምስራቅ አፍሪቃ ምድር የዘር ልዩነትና የብሄር ጭቆናን ያመጣው የነፍጠኛ ስርዐት ነው። (279)

[96] As I find the expressions used to address the groups of the people so offensive, I refrain from presenting them word for word.

in a dialogic relation and support each other in challenging Amhara religious views. Through these examples, Hawani explains how the *neftenya* and the proponents of their system debase and dehumanize the non- Amhara peoples in Ethiopia.

Hawani also discusses naming in her talk. She explains the name-changing practices undertaken by the Amhara invaders within a larger political context, including the impact of name-changing on the psychology of those whose names are changed. She brings in non-Oromo cases, such as the Wolayitta and Yem, who reside in the southern region of present-day Ethiopia. When the Wolayitta lost the war with Menelik's force, they also lost 18,000 cattle, and about 2,000 young Wolayitta children were sold into slavery by Menelik's soldiers. Their name was changed to 'Wolamo', or 'cattle/cow.'[97] Hawani adds that the survivors of this atrocious war were so dehumanized, and psychologically impacted that they have come to hate their Wolayitta identity. She also presents the case of the Yem, whose name was also changed to 'Jenjero', meaning 'monkey' in Amharic. This is because the Yem annihilated the *neftenyas* from the top of the mountains during the occupation of their land, and the *neftenyas* interpreted this as the act of monkeys and named them accordingly (p.286). Hawani does not quote any source text for these historical incidents, but it can be claimed that she reworks or dialogizes Waqo's, given that she is familiar with his narratives. Moreover, Waqo had mentioned these peoples though he did not address name-changing in relation to them.
Hawani further discusses the practice of name-changing in relation to specific encounters she experienced. She mentions and compares two cases she has encountered among Amhara communities (p. 281). One day in Gondar she heard Amhara men

[97] The meaning of these two words, 'Wolamo' and 'Jenjero', does not exactly match Hawani's explanation. Literally, the words are meaningless in Amharic, but their use in the context of addressing an ethnic group is offensive. People believe that they derive from two Amharic homophones: 'wolamo' supposedly derives from the word 'lam' in Amharic, which literally means cow, whereas Jenjero supposedly derives from 'zinjero', meaning monkey. Both are ethnic slurs and nobody uses them these days to address these ethnic groups.

making fun of the Oromo personal name '*Baacaa*'. This Oromo name, she says, is a name to be proud of in Oromo culture (though she does not give its meaning, possibly because her audience is largely Afan Oromo speakers), but Amhara people cannot understand it. She mentions an embarrassing Amharic personal name she encountered in another region, '*Shinabachew*', which means 'urinate over them', and argues that it is odd for the Amhara, given that they have such a strange name in their culture, to make fun of a better name like '*Baacaa*', which means 'someone comical who makes others laugh'. She uses these examples not to criticize Amhara naming practices per se but to advise her audience not to react even when they are provoked by the pro-*neftenya* groups. But she warns the Oromo against giving their children Amhara names such as '*Kurabachew*', meaning 'show them your pride' (implying, look down on others).

Unlike Anole's, Hawani's argument has a clear objective, and she suggests practical solutions. For example, faced with the *neftenya* proponents who object to criticism of the history of the oppression and tell others: 'We are interrelated through marriage and birth so do not raise past history'.[98] Hawani argues that such a belief is wrong and has nothing to do with learning one's history, whether it is good or bad. Whether or not history impacts upon the present relationship between the Amhara and the Oromo, the victims want to remember and to explore their harrowing past because it helps them shape their future, she argues. Here, her speech is dialogic and alludes to the ethnic-based federalism of the EPRDF, the coalition party she is affiliated to, which at the time of her presentation is about to wrest power from the military Derg government. As I noted earlier, Hawani's talk is not a personal reflection but part of the EPRDF policy, so that it is a telling example of double-voiced speech, and can be understood through contextual narratology as evidence of the impact of the extra-textual context. According to EPRDF policy, oppressed peoples are encouraged to learn their history but should

[98] 'ተዋልደናልና ያለፈውን አታንሱ' (280)

not use it to take revenge on their Amhara brothers, since what oppressed them is the system established by the ruling class, not the Amhara people in general. This policy, according to Marzagora (2017), shows the TPLF, and later on the EPRDF, embracing a counter-hegemonic narrative within a (new) nationalist narrative, and it is with this policy that the multi-ethnic federal government was established in 1991.

Hawani's report is presented through the technique of direct speech, and Hawani acts as the homodiegetic narrator of the report. However, the report is dialogic for two reasons. First, it is double-voiced discourse as it serves at least two authors, first, Hawani herself, who is a narrator of her own report, and the extradiegetic narrator who introduces her to the reader. Second, the report is dialogic because its historical aspect is a rejoinder to the history of the Great Tradition, which always glosses over these perspectives of the Oromo people. Through her oral presentation, the narrator tells us, Hawani interacts with her audience and affirms the Oromo belief about their past, promises them and challenges their attitudes about the promised policy premises. This is shown through a technique of a question-and-answer interaction between Hawani and her audience through which dialogic interaction is enhanced where the participants ask questions, and she responds. Through this dialogic engagement with the history of the Great Tradition and with the perspectives of the Oromo on historical themes, the novel juxtaposes the history of the Great Tradition and counter-hegemonic histories so that it can be argued that the novel does not promote a single omniscient view about Ethiopian history.

Conclusion

Yeburqa Zimita deviates from the Amharic historical novels in both content and form, challenging the history of the Great Tradition. From the content point of view, the novel draws on war histories and focuses on historical events effected by the wars (the Ethiopian Civil War and Menelik's war of expansion) and narrates them from the

perspectives of the war victims. The main reason why the novel draws on war histories, I argue, is that it was through wars (mainly the war of empire expansion of the 19th century) that different ethnic groups came in to contact and these encounters determined their subsequent relationships. The novel makes careful use of narrative strategies in order to foreground the perspectives of the war victims or those who were defeated in the war of expansion, these perspectives are missing from the national Ethiopian history (see Semir 2009; Sorenson 1993; Toggia 2008; Marzagora 2017 for how the perspectives of the marginalized people are excluded).

The novel mounts its critique and alternative perspective on the Ethiopian national history by shifting thematic and geographical focus; through a character system in which minor characters spouting the Great Tradition views are challenged through debate by the protagonists, through a careful use of shifting focalization; and by making space for multilingual voices and textual fragments in the text. In order to resist the omniscient frame of narration of the Great Tradition, the novel employs multiple focalizors and narrators, through which the voices of different groups within the marginalized peoples are foregrounded.[99] It uses spatial re-imagination so as to grant agency for the occupied peoples in telling their stories and experiences.[100] Through the introduction of new significant geographies and the re-interpretation of old significant geographies of the Great Tradition, the novel unfolds the voices of the people that populate these geographies. This agency is further enhanced through direct representation of the speeches of the characters who represent the voices of a certain group, like Waqo or Hawani. Internal dialogism and dialogized heteroglossia are used to foreground competing views about specific historical incidents or themes, and they

[99] Authors like Dawson (2017), Fludernik (2012), Herman (2007), Horstkotte (2005), Fludernik (2011) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983) extensively discuss how narrative form, mainly focalization and multiplicity of narrators can be used to challenge the traditional omniscient narrator.

[100] Dannenberg (2008), De Bleeker (2014), Massey (2005), Ronen (1986), Woloch (2003) and Zoran (1984) present important ideas about the importance of space in understanding narratives.

are used to balance the competing narratives so that this saves the novel from being a 'mouthpiece' of single narrative.

These careful thematic choice and narrative strategies are orchestrated towards two major modalities of historical representation and the construction of past through which the novel challenges the history and historiography of the Great Tradition. First, by storying oral history of the marginalized peoples from their own perspectives. The prominence given to such oral history, particularly through Waqo's stories refracted through Anole's character, presents new perspectives on the Ethiopian history and this also sheds the light on the limitation of the historiography of the Great Tradition, which is entirely centred on Amharic chirographic culture. Second, by experimenting through the character of Hawani with approaches of history writing of the Great Tradition—which is a single-hero centred history writing and narrating history of the people under the view of a single hero or from the omniscient authoritative perspective—the novel reveals how the approach is reductive and inhibiting. Finally, it needs to be noted that the novel does not advocate only one-sided views of history writing and telling though it tends to present the tenets of the Great Tradition mostly in order to question and challenge them. However, there are a few very vocal minor characters, like Yodit's father, who advocate for the history of the Great Tradition regardless of the limited narrative space given for them. This dimension of the histories of wars is missing and the perspectives of the occupied people also ignored as we read them in historical books like Bahiru's history book.

Chapter 2
The silences of the Great Tradition
Counter-hegemonic narratives in *Yoomi Laataa?*

Otoo finyooni hinjirree, yaa ijoolle
Finyoon dheeran hinjirree
Maaltu muka yaabbataa 2x
Damma nyaachuuf abdata.
Utuu seenaan hinjirree
Yoona maaltu ofi yaadataa 2x
Eenyummaa isaan dhaadata.
Adaraa yaa Oromoo!
Koree koree dhaabadhaa
Galmee seenaa qoradhaa 2x
Namni seenaa isaa hinbeenne
Bishaan gabatee irraatii
*Gara argetti jallata 2x (*Ebisa Adunya 1988,emphasis mine).

Dear friends, had there not been a rope
Had there not been a long rope
No one could have climbed a tree (2x)
And no one hoped to eat the honey.
Had there not been history
No one would have known oneself (2x)
And feel proud of one's identity.
Please Oromo!
Form teams
That survey your historical records (2x).
A person ignorant of his/ her history
Is like water on a ***gabatee***/ wooden plate
And flows in any direction.

This is a typical example of Oromo historical music, where history stands out as the main theme of the song. It was sung by Ebbisa Addunya, and though it is not part of the novel, it illuminates the context in which the novel was written.[101] One of the concerns of early modern Oromo nationalists in their journey to form one Oromo state and a unified Oromo ideology was Oromo history. In Ebbisa's song presented above, history is a base for one's identity and source of identity-based pride. Not knowing one's history is equated with not knowing oneself. As the last two lines of the stanza show, Ebissa claims that a person who does not know one's history has no firm point to stand on. He uses the metaphor of water on a plate to show how the lack of historical knowledge makes a person ideologically and historically aimless/pointless. History in

[101] Ebbisa Adunya (1973-1996), born in Dambi Dollo (Wallaga), was a musician, poet, singer, songwriter, Oromo nationalist, political activist and member of the OLF, and a very vocal critic of the TPLF domination of Oromo. In the above song (*geerarsa*), he tells us that history determines one's identity, and that people who do not know their history are like water on a plate that flows in any direction.

this sense is a firm ground on which we tread. One of the main aims of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was to bring together Oromo political concerns on one political platform. During the high time of the Oromo nationalism, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a relentless commitment among Oromo artists, political elites, liberation fighters, and others in order to create a single Oromo identity (*oromummaa*) and create a strong unity among different Oromo groups, who the Amhara administration had purposively kept apart and tried to assimilate under Amhara cultural domination.[102] The actors in this mission of forming an Oromo identity mainly drew on artistic expressions, and particularly songs, as we see in *Yoomi Laataa?* Such a political purpose impacted many Oromo songs, and other literary genres including the novel, so that they seem more didactic as they tend to over emphasize the educational aspect of a work of art.

Yoomi Laataa?, the first historical novel in Afan Oromo, reflects the characteristics of Ebbisa's and many other Oromo songs, that is it upholds history and presents it as a marker of one's identity. As we shall see, the novel draws on a large number of similar historical songs in order to construct Oromo-centred historical narratives while strongly critiquing of the history of the Ethiopian Great Tradition. Unlike *Yeburqa Zimita*, though, *Yoomi Laataa?* focuses on what I call the 'silent sides' of the Great Tradition, that is to say that the periods, themes and perspectives that the national history silences or bypasses in silence. Yet, as Orsini (2015:359) reminds us, '[s]ilence is not absence. Spaces that look empty are in fact teeming with other people and their own tastes, stories, and trajectories. We just need to look elsewhere'. Particularly with regard to Ethiopia, historian Christopher Clapham (2002:41) tells us that the history of the Great Tradition

[102] The concept of *Oromummaa* (Oromoness) is extensively discussed by Asafa Jalata (1998) and Gemechu Megersa (1996). For further discussion on the Oromo identity and the assault inflicted on it by Amhara/ Ethiopian government, see Asafa (1995, 1998, 2007), Gemechu (1996), Gow (2002), Holcomb and Sisai (1990), Mohammed (2016), and Mollenhauer (2011).

> imposes an emphasis on some periods, people, and places, and at the same time excludes or marginalises others. The 'great tradition' history of Ethiopia 'bounces' as it were from one episode to another, touching ground only at selected points while flying at great speed over others. The points at which it touches the ground are, inevitably, those that can be used to glorify the state: Axum, Lalibela, the medieval empire, the resistance to Roman Catholicism, and especially the creation of the modern Ethiopian state at the hands of Tewodros and Menelik.

Clapham outlines the 'silent sides' of the Great Tradition, which include historical periods, people and places, and its selective approach and use of historical events for the glorification of the 'Greater Ethiopia' (Levine 1974). In addition, *Yoomi Laataa?* shows, there are historical themes, historical personages, events, and perspectives that the Great Tradition attempts to silence or systematically ignores. This silenced narrative was presented by the OLF's 'colonial thesis' (Marzagora 2017), which argued that the Oromo experienced 'an internal colonialism' under the Amhara administration so that they need liberation. *Yoomi Laataa?* represents this understanding of Ethiopian history and is also an example of what Linda Hutcheon (2004) calls 'historiographic metafiction', which uses official chronology and dates but also reworks non-fictional historical documents in its revisionist approach. By zooming in on the silenced narrative about the Oromo, the novel draws on the same narrative techniques employed by *Yeburqa Zimita* such as spatial (re)imagination, character system and characterization, multiple narrators and shifting focalization, speech representation, and dialogism.[103]

Though it uses the same narrative techniques aimed at foregrounding counter hegemonic narratives, the specific use of each technique is different in *Yoomi Laataa?*, as my discussion will show. For example, *Yoomi Laataa?* highlights on the silences of the Ethiopian national history by celebrating the Oromo historical figures, constructing the

[103] Monika Fludernik (2012, 2018) shows that the same narrative 'toolbox', to use Dawson's (2017) expression, can be utilized in different contexts and we do not necessarily create new narrative techniques to represent different new narratives.

history of the Oromo nationalism focusing on silenced period (for example, the Italian period), and narrating the pre-occupation Oromo indigenous way of life, shifting point of representation in the narration of Ethiopian history, and presenting contested themes, places and memorial signs (statutes for the Amhara kings and their war leaders). The novel draws on the personal history and memories of the members of one Oromo family (Yadanno Jarra's). It also introduces a new approach to history writing, what I call an 'integrated approach', intertwining both oral and written evidence in order to develop a balanced approach to the history of people who were prevented from developing writing system to document their history under the oppressive Amhara administration. The chapter is divided into four major sections: first, it introduces the novel and its major themes along with the narrative strategies employed to present them. The second section focuses on the historical narrative of the pre-1974 Ethiopian Revolution. The third section is about the Oromo historical narratives during the era of identity politics, or post-1974 revolution, while the conclusion reads together *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Yeburqa Zimita*.

2.1 (Re)storying the national history from a marginal position

Yoomi Laataa? comprises sixteen chapters that cover modern Ethiopian history from the mid-19th century to the last decade of the 20th century as clearly stated in the preface of the novel.[104] Chapter 1 introduces the rise of Emperor Tewodros (r.1855-1868), who laid the foundation of the Ethiopian empire, and the occupation of Oromo lands by Emperor Menelik (r.1886-1913), who successfully completed the project of empire formation. The chapter specifically focuses on how Oromo lands were forcibly confiscated, and the Oromo were enslaved to work for the Amhara fusiliers (the *neftenyas*) who settled on the lands after the war. Chapter 2 focuses further on the socio-political crisis that faced

[104] '*Do'iin kunniin hundi Bara mootummaa Atsee Tewoodiroos irraa hanga bara kufaatii Koloneel Mangistuu Haayilee Maariyaam kan raawwatameedha'* (5). All the events presented in this book took place from the era of Emperor Tewodros to the end of the regime of Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam.

one Oromo group, the Hararge Oromo, who inhabit the eastern part of the present Ethiopia. This history provides the background for the narratives presented in the subsequent chapters of the novel, which follows the stories of two families, impacted by the politics of different Ethiopian regimes. The first family, on which the main plot of the novel is based, is the Oromo family of Yadanno Jarra Walabumma, in which Yadanno's wife, Sintolinna and her son Sandaba, later play a crucial role. The second is the Amhara aristocrat family of Getaw Mindaysil. Getaw and his Oromo driver, Wariyo, present important historical themes about Haile Selassie's regime.

The main plotline starts in Chapter 1 with the conflict between Yadanno and his master, Gizachew. Gizachew is an Amhara landlord in the village of Harawe in the Hararge region. Yadanno and his wife Sintolinna work for him. One unfortunate day, Yadanno discovers Sintolinna sleeping with Gizachew and beheads his master. In fear of vindictive retribution, both Yadanno and Sintolinna are forced to leave Harawe. The narrator does not tell us further about Yadanno, but focuses on Sintolinna, who flees to the nearby town of Harar. There she meets another Amhara landlord, Getaw. Getaw, who was born in Hararge into an aristocratic family and later moved to Addis Ababa, owns a huge amount of land in Hararge, inherited from his father, who participated in Menelik's war on Hararge [105]. Getaw frequently visits his farmlands.

The very day Sintolinna runs away, Getaw comes across her beside the main road from Harar to Addis Ababa. He is impressed by her physical appearance and asks her if she wants to go to Addis Ababa with him. Getaw is unaware of Sintolinna's situation and intends to keep her as his secret mistress, since he has no child from his wife. Sintolinna has a baby son from her marriage to Yadanno. However, Getaw lies to his wife when he tells that he has brought Sintolinna home because he wants to adopt her son.

[105] Caulk (1971) presents detail information about Menelik's war on Hararge and *Yoomi Laataa?* presents different interpretation as I have shown throughout this thesis.

Unfortunately, he finds it difficult to begin romantic relationship because of regular presence of his wife at home, but his driver, Wariyo, who was with him the day Sintolinna came to Addis Ababa, grabs the opportunity to begin a relationship with Sintolinna himself, and later they marry. The arrival of Sintolinna in Getaw's family introduces an Oromo group there and starts intermarriage between the two families. Wariyo is married to Sintolinna, while her son, Sandaba, marries Fiqir, Getaw's foster daughter. The marriage is formalized after Getaw and his wife die following the fall of Haile Selassie government and this happens at the end of Chapter 3.

From Chapter 4 onwards, the novel narrates the history of the Derg regime (1974-91), and the impact of the Civil War on the Ethiopian people as represented by Sintolinna's family. After Getaw dies, the Derg continues harassing his workers and his daughter, Fiqir, and eventually they are forced to leave Addis Ababa. As a result, the family is split, and so is the plotline. Sandaba, Fiqir and their twin sons move to Naqamte, in Wallaga. Meanwhile, Wariyo and Sintolinna move back to Harar, Sintolinna's birth place. Under the Derg regime, each family is unable to settle down in one place. Derg dictatorship affects each member of the two families. Sintolinna and Fiqir in particular are subjected to multiple harassment, and Sintolinna barely escapes government-ordered murder and is tortured in the Derg prison in Harar (YL 241). Sandaba's children, Alkuma and Alkitil, are forcibly conscripted into the Derg national defence force (YL 222), whereas Sandaba is forced to leave the country.

Through conversations between characters and the comments by the extradiegetic narrator, we become aware of the lawlessness and maladministration that engulfed the Derg government. The regime is marked by repression, marginalization, various degrees of torture, and arbitrary mass killings of civilians and members of the other parties. We read of the Derg's selective attacks on people believed to be rich and used to be affiliated with the Haile Selassie regime (Ch. 4 to 6). The political condition gradually

worsens, following growing opposition to the regime and the escalation of the war with the government of Mohamed Siad Barre of Somalia and with the Eritrean and Tigrayan liberation fronts. Chapter 16 deals with the last moments of the Derg government and its eventual collapse. The chapter also presents the birth of a coalition government, the EPRDF, and the formation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, which invites all liberation fighters and people living in exile to return home. It is in this political space that Sintolinna's extended family is finally able to be united in Addis Ababa, bringing together the plots of the novel. The novel ends with their celebrations at Sintolinna's home.

Yoomi Laataa? is not only a historical, but also a political novel, and this is hinted at in the title of the novel, which does not refer to any history but rather contains a politically motivated question. The novel re-writes Ethiopian political history from the marginalized perspective of the Oromo, as the author explicitly mentions in the preface. It is aimed at teaching history, and this aspect is made prominent in several ways. First, the question in the title, *yoomi laataa?* (when shall it be?) is enhanced by the photography of the author on the front cover page, which carries a facial expression evoking confusion. The question is about the undefined time when the Oromo are expected to get justice or free themselves from Amhara cultural and political domination, and it is historicized over a century. The question, the author's photograph, his prefatory materials and bibliography suggest that Isayas Hordofa has tried to impress a strong factual, didactic, and argumentative slant to the novel.

Right from the preface, the author expounds on the importance of history and the relevance of the form of the historical novel as relevant for the Oromo struggle for freedom: 'no one can escape the 'camera' of history. The camera of history surveys

everyone from high up in the sky' (5).[106] He adds, 'when you read this book, please do not blame me for talking about past history! We have a lot to learn from history' (ibid). Besides, in the preface again, the author tells us that he started to write the novel after the fall of the Derg government because he is concerned with the denial or distorted representation of the Oromo in the Ethiopian national history and other historical documents (Jeylan 2006). The author designates his text as a 'historical novel', not because it conflates history with fiction but to stress its educational and corrective purpose, that is, the novel allows him to fill the gaps in historical data through fictional characters and their stories.

A testimonial on the back cover of the novel by an Oromo historian at Addis Ababa University, Prof. Tesemma Ta'a, also emphasises the historical aspect of the novel.[107] Lastly, Isayas stresses the importance of learning from history, and specifically he mentions *Ras* Gobana, an Oromo general who fought for Emperor Menelik and helped him occupy Oromo lands: 'For that matter, the number of the Oromos who helped the past *neftenya* regimes were not a few in number, like *Ras* Gobana. I hope we learn hugely from their wrongdoings'.[108] If Oromo themselves greatly contributed to their

---

[106] *'Haata'ullee malee eenyullee taanaan kaameeraa seenaa jalaa dhokatee miliquu hindanda'u. Kaameeraan seenaa baldheensa Waaqaa irraa gadi isa ilala.'*

[107] '[This novel] is based on true historical experiences in which the author himself has mostly been involved in and has supplied his readers with significant firsthand information. The selection of his characters, their meaningful names and their activities clearly portray and reflect the life of the Oromo and the Oromo nation with an unanswered question they still raise in Ethiopia which went on for more than a century now. Reading this book is very much invaluable and educative not only as a novel written in a beautiful and clear language but also for its rich historical knowledge. It is a highly recommended reading material for all those who want to know the recent Oromo history, culture and relentless political struggle. Above all it will help them to think of an answer to the question raised in the title of the book.' (YL 279).

[108] *Kitaaba kana yeroo dubbistan kan dabre maaliif kaasa naan hinjedhinaa! Kan dabre irraa waan barannu qabna. Sirnooti Nafxanyaa dabran rorroo nurratti raawwatan tumsuudhaan Oromooti lammii isaanii miidhan lakkoofsi isaanii xiqqa miti. Kan akka Raas Goobanaafaa jechuu kooti. Waan kana ta'eef daguungora isaanii kaleessaa irraa barachuu dandeenya jedheen yaada'*(YL 5).

occupation by their enemies, historical novels like *Yoomi Laataa?* can help by teaching Oromo readers about such mistakes.

Despite its long historical span, most part of the novel (12 chapters out of 16), is devoted only to the relatively short historical period of 17 years of the Derg regime (1974-91). From the perspective of the contextual narratology, this could be largely attributed to the biographical experience of the author: Isayas actually worked for the Derg government and has a first-hand knowledge about the period. Moreover, this recent past is memorable to this Oromo writer for several other reasons. Not only was he subjected to the harassments and unjustified arrest, but as a journalist writing in Afan Oromo he was also forerunner in the promotion of the Oromo culture and language. These extra-textual elements impact the form and content of the novel and find reflection in the novel, as I will show. The author's view of history in general, and of specific issues such as the 'Gobanas', i.e., the Oromos who work for the Ethiopian government in attacking the Oromo, the lack of unity among the Oromo, language politics and ideology, and the oppression of the Oromo under the Amhara administration, are mostly narrated and focalized by a character called Eliyas Hordofa in the second section (Chs 4 to 16) of the novel. This character, introduced in Chapter 5, largely reflects the author's view on Oromo politics.[109] His understanding of political history and language ideology, like that of other characters such as Sandaba and

[109] In the novel (p.118), Eliyas is born in Naqamte Town, and his grandfather, Mijana Gole, participated in the battle of Embabo, in which the Oromo in Wallaga were defeated at the hands of an Amhara king, Tekle Haimanot, in the late 19th century. We are given a long ancestral line of Eliyas extending up to ten generations. Two aspects of this list of ancestral names support my contention that Eliyas is the textual representation of the author. First, no other character's ancestral lineage is exhaustively listed and discussed. Second, except for the first name, all the other ancestral names of the character Eliyas and the author Esayas are the same. What is more, the professional careers (first a schoolteacher and later a journalist) and the academic backgrounds of the two are the same. Their political views are also similar, as both of them are supporters of counter-hegemonic narratives. Moreover, the author confirmed during the interview I had with him that Eliyas is his textual representation and that he used him to express his own political ideology, though, and this is important for the novel's multivocality, his views do not form the overarching view of the novel as he reduced his view to that of one character.

Wariyo, helps voice counter-hegemonic narratives. This multiplicity of focalizing agents and the shift in focalization, as we shall see, bring forth a multiplicity of perspectives through which the marginalized voices in the novel are presented. The novel also uses heteroglossia like speeches, cultural and historical songs to teach and reconstruct Oromo history. These oral texts voice criticism of the Amhara administration by exposing how all the Amhara emperors (and not only Menelik, as in *Yeburqa Zimita*) followed the same policy towards the Oromo.

Though *Yoomi Laataa?* draws on similar narrative strategies as *Yeburqa Zimita*, it uses them in different ways and within specific contexts, according to its specific political purpose and thematic focus. *Yoomi Laataa?* engages didactically with the reconstruction of Oromo history, using an integrated approach that draws on both oral and written evidence. An example is the history of the town of Harar, which the novel presents as founded by the Oromo. The narrator uses the Oromo traditional calendar to date its earliest foundation back in the 12th century. In so doing, the novel also implies/suggests that the Oromo *Gadaa* system was founded by then. This historical reconstruction is politically significant as far as Oromo history is concerned. In Ethiopian national history, for example in Bahiru Zewde's history book discussed in the previous chapter, the 16th century is commonly presented as the period when the Oromo came to be known for the first time. By moving the date back and reactivating what I call a silenced period (a point I turn to below), the novel contests the official periodization of Ethiopian national history. *Yoomi Laataa?*, then, follows the chronology of national historiography but resists it, first, by shifting point of representation, and second, by introducing Oromo-specific historical themes within the framework of the Ethiopian national history. To do this, the novel uses two major narrators: the anonymous, third-person extradiegetic narrator narrates Ethiopian history, while an intradiegetic (or homodiegetic) narrators tell Oromo history. Now I turn to the major narrative techniques employed in *Yoomi Laataa?* to present the historical themes.

The main narrative technique to represent historical themes in *Yooomi Laataa?* is spatial imagination. Unlike *Yeburqa Zimita*, though, *Yoomi Laataa?* introduces a wide range of new significant geographies and totally shifts the spatial focus of national history to include the geographies of the Ethiopian Civil War in northern, eastern, central, and western Ethiopia, while still mindful of the older significant geographies of Ethiopian national history and Amharic historical novels, such as the northern highlands, particularly the Tigray region. Through this spatial remapping, the novel zooms in on the perspectives and history of the people who populate these other geographies. In *Yeburqa Zimita*, the emphasis was entirely Tigrayan and Eritrean, whereas the Oromo and Amhara were presented as relatively less impacted by the Civil War and Derg dictatorship. Even the conflict in Burqa is presented as an Oromo revolt (of only 1000 Oromo) against the Amhara settlers and not against the Derg government. *Yoomi Laataa?* resists this idea by showing how the Derg dictatorship targeted the Oromo in the same way it targeted the Tigrayans and Eritreans. It also presents the Amhara aristocrats as targets of the Derg attacks not for their ethnic identity but rather for their political ideology, because they wanted to continue their feudal oppression. By presenting the Oromo case, as I show in a separate section of this chapter, the Derg government was ethnically biased in its marginalization, and in most cases the Oromo were attacked for their identity and not only for their political ideology. Conversely, no Amhara character in this novel is attacked just for being an Amhara.

Second, the character system and the related narrative techniques of characterization play a great role in challenging the history of the Great Tradition. Characterization in this novel is mainly developed through the dialogues between the characters that help us know more about the characters, and through the narrator's explanations about the characters. The novel includes a large number of characters that come from different walks of life, notably, peasants, government officials, professionals, women, men,

children, freedom fighters, refugees, university students, Christians, and so on, and their stories intertwined in a way that makes the novel structurally complex. These characters have different views about their linguistic identity, and some of them are multilingual while others are monolinguals as I show in Chapter 3. Key historical events in Ethiopian history are told as recollections by a few protagonists, while others are narrated as personal experiences by the characters and the narrators. The novel uses the technique of flashback to represent these historical narratives. Historical figures also figure as characters: they further connect fiction to history and help make the historical aspect of the novel prominent.

The main characters can be divided into two major groups, the Oromo (Sandaba, Sintolinna, Wariyo and Eliyas) and the Amhara (Getaw, Befirdu, Lidya and Gizachew), according to the languages they speak, their names, political outlook, and ethnic background. These characters have different experiences and views about Ethiopian political history. For example, most Oromo protagonists are supporters of the counter-hegemonic narratives, though the degree of their involvement varies, with Sandaba and Eliyas being the more outspoken and vocal supporters of Oromo nationalism. As for the Amhara characters, they represent the Amhara perspective of Ethiopian historiography or the Great Tradition and mostly affiliate themselves with the government. Even when they are in conflict with the government, they never question its legitimacy. As we shall see, characters like Getaw, Lidya and Befirdu reflect the perceived supremacy of their Amhara identity.

The names of some characters carry larger political messages, something I expand on later in my discussion. Wariyo symbolises the original Oromo tradition of the Borana[110]

[110] The Borana is a group of the Oromo that live in the southern Ethiopia around the Ethio-Kenyan boarder. They are known for their allegiance to their tradition culture as the impact of the Amhara culture is less in this part of the country due to the geographical distance from the centre and harsh climatical condition.

that survived the influence of Amhara domination and is a point of reference in the cultural reconstruction of the Oromo indigenous tradition. While Wariyo is a Borana and, despite his wanderings and relative cosmopolitanism, is still the bearer of a relatively untouched cultural tradition, Sandaba the next generation, though born in Hararge, is brought up in the central Ethiopia, where he is able to get a university education during the era of Emperor Haile Selassie. The topic of naming and name changing is one of the main concerns in *Yoomi Laataa?* and usually connected to identity politics among the Oromo. As we will see in the subsequent section, the character system and characterization in *Yoomi Laataa?* are informed by naming practices.

Third, the novel uses multiple narrators and shifting focalization to present the historical themes through different viewpoints. The extradiegetic narrator introduces some major historical issues like the expansion of the Amhara kings from their base in the northern highland plateau, the sufferings of the people they occupy, the short-lived political reform of the Derg government, and so on. Other themes are introduced by homodiegetic and intradiegetic narrators who are the proponents of counter-hegemonic histories or of the Great Tradition, namely Sandaba, Eliyas, Getaw and Befirdu, respectively. For example, Sandaba and Eliyas repeatedly talk about language policy, and though their focus is their own ethnic group, the Oromo, they envisage an ethnic-based federal government which will equally share resources and political power among the different people in Ethiopia. *Yoomi Laataa?* shifts focalization among different internal and external focalizors. For example, changes in the political situation following regime change, as when Haile Selassie regime collapses, are indicated through shift in focalization which, in some cases, causes detours in the plot.

Several events are retrospectively narrated as individual and/or collective memories. These events are important in the construction of the counter-hegemonic narratives of

the 'narrative community' (Nünning 2009, 61), the Oromo.[111] These include Wariyo's reflections on Borana naming practices and the socio-political structure of the Oromo people before the coming of the Amhara when he travels with Getaw (in Ch. 2), and his narration of the political history of Oromo nationalism to his family (in Ch. 3); Sandaba's reference to the three major battles that took place in the second half of the 19th century at Embabo, Calanqo and Anole when he argues with Befirdu (Ch. 5): all are included in the larger plot through flashbacks, which connect the characters' individual memories to the collective memory of the 'narrative community' to which the characters affiliate themselves. Such personal or collective memories of the narrators and characters thematise history in different forms: as sharing experiences (Wariyo), public oral speeches (Sandaba), or as personal reflections on historical events or themes (Eliyas and Wariyo).

The novel draws on various techniques of speech representation, with the words of the characters (intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrators) either directly quoted or summarized. In a few cases, the narrator summarises the general historical events of a given period (for example, Chapter 1 presents an overview of Ethiopian history in the second half of the 19th century, and Chapter 4 introduces policy reforms by the Derg government following the 1974 revolution), but mostly historical events are narrated or discussed directly by characters and direct speech is dominantly used to present historical topics. In this regard, Bridgeman (2007:57) tells us, '[a]ll reading is a combination of memory and anticipation'. For Oromo readers, flashbacks provide the memory of the 'good' old days before the coming of the Amhara invaders, while the anticipation of freedom is reflected in discussions about the possible future and the title

[111] According to Nunning (2009:61) narrative communities are the 'communities forged and held together by the stories their members tell about themselves and their culture as well as by conventionalized forms of storytelling and cultural plots.'

of the novel itself, '*yoomi laataa?*' (when shall it be?) is a reflection of this condition. Sandaba and Eliyas, in dialogized monologues, frequently speculate about the freedom of their people.

Lastly, dialogism is used to different ends in *Yoomi Laataa?,* particularly to foreground differences in characters' views, to expose contested places (spaces) or topics, and to highlight the dominance of the Amhara world views. New historical topics are also typically introduced in the form of dialogized speeches, songs and monologues that have been totally excluded by the national history. Dialogism is also used to balance the views about historical events and themes presented by opposing characters, or to show the other side of the history told by some characters. For example, when Sandaba claims that the land in the central Ethiopia belongs to the Oromo, an Amhara character, Befirdu, challenges him by presenting the occupation of the same land by the Italian force and Haile Selassie's role in soliciting the British government to oust the Italians (*YL,* Ch.5). In the next two sections, I show how the novel uses these formal elements of novelistic narrative to highlight counter-hegemonic narratives while still being mindful of Great Tradition history.

2.2 Shifting historical representation: Ethiopian history before the 1974 revolution

In *Yoomi Laataa?,* the majority of the historical themes of modern Ethiopian history are cramped within the first 100 pages. The difference between the first three chapters and the other thirteen that focus on the two decades of the Derg regime is marked narratively and thematically. The first three chapters present the socio-political crises faced the Oromo following Menelik's war of expansion but not the actual war, whereas the history after 1974 is dominantly about the ordeal of the Oromo people during the Civil War of the Derg period (1974-91). As I have mentioned earlier, the novel follows the official chronology of the national historiography but contests it by stressing the

silenced periods and pushing back the starting point for the Oromo history. In doing so, as we shall see, the novel introduces new historical themes into Ethiopian history, like the history of the Oromo nationalism during the Italian occupation, when the Oromo presented to the British consulate in the western Ethiopia— a request that their independent state be under the jurisdiction of the United Nations.[112] It also presents the Oromo indigenous ways of life before the occupation.

Yoomi Laataa? employs narrative techniques such as multiple narrators and shifting focalization, spatial (re)imagination, characterization, and dialogism in order to re-present pre-revolution Ethiopian history. These narrative techniques, along with other techniques such as frequency and analepsis that are prominent in a few scenes, shift the frame of representation of historical narratives. Through the protagonist of the first three chapters, Wariyo, an Oromo cultural figure who advocates for Oromo history, the Oromo perspective, a perspective that is usually silenced in the national historiography, dominates.[113] We first meet Wariyo in Harar, the very day when his master Getaw meets Sintolinna who is running away. Wariyo works as a personal driver to Getaw but is very knowledgeable about Oromo history and culture thanks to his readings and his travels during his previous job as a driver for a Swedish non-government organization. Getaw is presented as a nice person towards Wariyo, and his pleasant behaviour encourages Wariyo to express himself freely. Wariyo is the dominant intradiegetic narrator in Chapters 2 and 3, which are mostly about the Haile Selassie regime, though he is challenged by his Amhara employers, Getaw and Lidya, over his claim of the Oromo independent indigenous culture. Wariyo is also the conduit of Oromo history before 1974.

---

[112] The Oromo history of this period is presented by Ezekiel Gebissa (2002) and *Yoomi Laataa?* is in dialogue with Ezekiel's article..

[113] In this section, the Amhara emperors are criticized and their exploitative expansion under the guise of state formation and their will to domination are highlighted.

As I have already mentioned, Chapter 1 presents a historical preamble which begins with the rise of Emperor Tewodros in the mid-19th century, who claimed the Israelite ancestry through King Solomon: 'I have been ordained by God to be a king [of Abyssinia] since my ancestral genealogy is from the family of Solomon and David of Israel'.[114] From the perspective of contextual narratology, this is the starting point of Great Tradition historiography, but the narrator does not reveal his views or tell us whether he supports or questions this assertion. In the rest of the chapter, the narrator tells us that Tewodros, and his successors launched military expeditions toward the south from their base in Abyssinia.[115] The narrative of these historical events focuses on the eastern part of the country with reference to real significant geographies of the Great Tradition, such as the battle of Calanqo (1887), where Menelik defeated the Oromo of the Hararge region.

This battle is also highly significant for the Oromo, but for opposite reasons. For Menelik, the battle won him a great fame and secured his administration over the eastern parts of the country. For the Oromo, it was a sign of humiliation and subsequently subjected them to a miserable life as the novel shows us the oppression and socio-political crises they were subjected to. Such a bidirectional representation of important events is achieved through dialogic techniques employed by the novel. There are two main historical issues presented in Chapter 1 as far as the Oromo view is concerned. The first is the loss of freedom, presented through characterization and symbolism, particularly, around the name and death of an Oromo patriot, Walabuma, who fought at Calanqo. His name, Walabuma, literally means freedom, and his death marks the end of Oromo freedom, since the Oromo in Hararge are subjected to serfdom after their defeat at this battle. The second is the issue of land confiscation: the Oromo

[114] *Ani saba Isiraa'el keessaa sanyii hidda warra Solomoonii fi Daawwitii, Waaqayyootu na muude*' (*YL* 6).

[115] This region refers to the northern regions in the present-day Ethiopia. It is composed of four small regions as indicated in *Yoomi Laataa?*: Gondar, Tigray, Gojam and Shawa (Ibid.).

were forced off their land and enslaved to work on their own land for the Amhara fusiliers who became landlords after the war. The narrator tells us that the traditional Oromo land administration (where land was mostly common property) was replaced by a new land administration, and the Oromo land was divided among the *neftenya* soldiers. The symbolism of Walabuma and his death lay the ground for further character development, since it is his grandson, Sandaba, who a century later takes over his great grandfather's role as a liberation fighter.

The spatial and narrative focus on the Hararge region as a significant geography is indicated through a change in the narrator, from extra- to intradiegetic. Accordingly, from the middle of Chapter 2 and throughout Chapter 3, Wariyo becomes the dominant narrator and focalizor as he tells us his political and cultural experiences under Haile Selassie's government as well as his historical memories. Early in Chapter 2, two historical themes—naming practices and the contested memorial statues built in the honour of the *neftenya* war leaders (*Ras* Mekonnen of Hararge and Menelik)—that were introduced by the extradiegetic narrator are further explained by Wariyo. The practice of name changing and its political implication are the most prominent theme in the pre-revolution historical narratives foregrounded in the novel: first through the narrative technique of frequency (it crops up six times in the novel, as we shall see); second, through characterization, in that the names of characters carry symbolic and political meanings; and finally, through dialogism, when name and name changing politics are discussed among Oromo and Amhara characters.

The first instance of name changing topic is introduced by the extradiegetic narrator in relation to the battle of Calanqo. Though in passing, the narrator mentions that the *neftenyas* address the occupied people, including the Oromo, by pejorative names that they never apply to themselves. The topic of name-changing and its political undertones are repeated throughout the novel in different contexts, and here the narrator lays the foundation for the subsequent cases:

> Of the Oromo groups, only the Hararge are addressed after the work they do, farming. The *neftenyas* [Amhara fusiliers] call them '*Qottuu*' (farmers). They have confiscated their land, and the Oromo in Hararge are forced to work on the farmlands of their new masters. Moreover, the *neftenyas* address the Oromo by names that lack dignity and respect, which the Oromo never use to address each other. They never call them by their true name, Oromo.[116]

Two aspects of naming are addressed in this paragraph. First, the Hararge as one Oromo group are negatively addressed by the *neftenyas* by the menial work they do. The similar issue was also presented by Hawani Waqo in *Yeburqa Zimita* (see Ch. 1). However, the demeaning and generic term *Qottuu* is reserved for the Hararge. As Getaw tells Wariyo, the Hararge are different from the Borana, and they are definitely *Qottuu.* Wariyo instead argues that all Oromo groups are the same and should not be treated as separate groups. Through such debates between Wariyo and Getaw, who claims familiarity with the Oromo, the novel exposes how Getaw, despite his long residence among them, is still ignorant about the Oromo and lacks knowledge about the relationship between different Oromo groups. By characterizing Wariyo as an educated man with a better access to international media outlets in comparison to Getaw's limited knowledge about Hararge, the novel uses it to show how the Amhara are ignorant of Oromo culture and world views. Being stunned by Wariyo's vast knowledge, even Getaw asks him how he is able to accumulate knowledge about the Oromo, Ethiopia and the world (*YL* 36).

---

[116] '*Oromoota keessaa maqaa gita hojiitiin kan waamamu Oromoo Harargee qofaadha. Nafxanyooti 'Qottuu' ittin jechuudhaan isa waamu. Nafxanyooti lafa irraa fudhatanii ofii abbaa lafaa tahanii Oromoon Harargee garuu Nafxanyootaaf lafa qotuudhaan akka jiraatan dirqaman. Walumaagalatti Nafxanyooti Oromoota hunda maqaa Oromoon ittiin of hin waamneen maqaa tuffiitiin isa waamu. Silaa maqaa isaa isa sirrii tahe Oromoo jedhanii ittiin hin waaman'* (YL 12). *Qottuu* literally means 'farmers' and particularly in relation to the Hararge Oromo, it carries a negative meaning to connote people inferior to the Amhara landlords or *neftenyas* who rule over them and consider themselves more civilised than their subordinates. (The Oromo never identify themselves by the work they do.)

After Getaw and Wariyo meet Sintolinna and they begin their journey to Addis Ababa, Sintolinna becomes cause for the first heated discussion between Wariyo and Getaw. The discussion begins with Getaw's enquiry about the meaning of the names of Sintolinna, her husband's (Yadanno), and Wariyo's. Sintolinna's answer continues the extradiegetic narrator's earlier mention of name changing practices.[117] When Getaw asks what her name is and how her father gave her that name, she innocently responds: 'He was tired of the *neftenya*'s humiliation and abuse and wished that the time may come when we are free from our current entanglement. May we be well because of you? May it be during your time that our land will be returned?'[118] Getaw's reaction is sharp: 'Your father is an ungrateful rebel. How can he say such things in these peaceful and good times?'[119] Sintolinna then confesses that she had no idea of the politics behind her father's words. Getaw does not stop there and also asks the meaning of other names in her family, not out of linguistic ignorance—since he knows Afan Oromo—or of curiosity, but in order to learn the context and the politics behind the names. To his surprise, Sintolinna tells him her husband's full name, Yadanno Jarra Walabumma (Memory of the era of freedom). This further confirms Getaw's suspicion about Sintolinna's family and he realises that the family has not accepted the Amhara administration: 'Oh! All your family members are rebels. They are ungrateful towards the government that has liberated Ethiopian peoples from slavery. It seems that you are not convinced that the Ethiopians were liberated by Emperor Haile Selassie'.[120]

---

[117] The name Sintolinna signifies future good wish or hope, or better future as reflected in her explanation about why her father gave her the name.

[118] *'[h]acuuccaan itti hammaatee barri toluuf didnaan barri dhufu siintolinna hacuuccaa fi roorroon nafxanyootaan nurratti raawwatamaa jiru kun dabree barri nuuf tolu nuuf dhufaa laataa? Siin tolinnaa laataa? Siintoluu danda'a taha. Lafti nurraa fudhatame deebi'a ta'a'* (p.24).

[119] *'Abbaan keeti fincilaadha. Bara nagaa bara gaariidhaan akkas jedhaa?'* (Ibid.).

[120] '*o!o!o! maatiin keessan hundi finciltootadha. Mootumaa gaarii ka ummata Itoophiyaa gabrummaa keessaa bilisa baase kana galata dhorkattan. Ummati Itoophiyaa bilisummaa kan argate mootii moototа keenya Hayile Sillaaseedhaan akka ta'e isinii hin liqimfamne jechuudhaa*' (Ibid.).

This conversation highlights competing views about the socio-political situation in Ethiopia as reflected through naming practices and debates about naming. On the one hand, Sintolinna tells us that her father lived a miserable life, her family has disintegrated due to the revenge murder her husband has committed, and now she is also running away from the place where she was born, leaving everything behind. Getaw, on the other hand, defends the views of the dominant Amhara ruling group: he states that the country is peaceful and that Sintolinna's people are ungrateful rebels. We see here diverging views about the socio-political condition in Ethiopia by two characters of different social status and ethnic background who have lived in the same region. Sintolinna ends the conversation by reiterating that she has no sense of the politics behind her family's names. The exchange exemplifies one way in which *Yoomi Laataa?* uses dialogism in order to bring different competing views on the same plane so that it helps us see the different sides of the same story. The dialogue among Wariyo, Getaw and Sintolinna show how the idea behind names is dialogized and creates active discussion (rejoinder), with another's speech (Sintolinna's father's idea) stylized and becoming a topic of heated discussion.

Getaw brings up the issue once again with Wariyo, by asking him the meaning of his name. This conversation between Wariyo, Sintolinna and Getaw about naming practices and name-changing runs for six pages and is one of the few long scenes in the novel. Beside the meaning of his name, Wariyo expounds on the whole gamut of naming practices among the Borana Oromo. He uses this explanation to tell Getaw that the name-changing undertaken by the Amhara government disrupted people's cultural practices and caused identity crisis. In order to support his claim, he talks about a naming ceremony called *Gubbisa* among the Borana, accompanied by several forms of folksongs. As we learn from his description, during the ceremony a baby is given a name depending on the context in which it is born. He takes the example of his own name, which means someone born during daytime. Throughout the dialogue, Getaw is

engaged and asks for further clarification about the idea and the Borana words that are unclear to him. In the meantime, the songs that the Borana perform during naming ceremony do not reflect the politics behind name changing practices as other songs I present in Chapter 4. This contradiction between the themes of the songs present, and the politically charged narrative context in which Wariyo presents them suggests that forced name-changing practices are unknown in the Borana land or do not concern or affect them. As someone living outside his community, though, Wariyo has not escaped the impact of name-changing politics, as another name changing scene in Chapter 3 shows.

In fact, the practice of name-changing becomes more political as the narrative develops. In Chapter 3, after Sintolinna and her son, Sandaba, arrive at Getaw's home in Addis Ababa, Lidya, Getaw's wife, accepts Sandaba as her adopted son but wants his name to be changed to an Amhara name. She warns her staff that, 'No one should address him by the ugly name, Sandaba, anymore'.[121] Sandaba and his mother are christened into the Orthodox Christianity on Saint Georgis Day, and Sandaba is renamed after the saint, Haile Georgis.[122] Wariyo here witnesses what he had discussed theoretically. In this context, the name change is a means by which Sandaba and Sintolinna are admitted as members of an aristocratic family and into Orthodox Christianity. Through this shift, Sandaba and his mother shed their Oromo identity in two ways: they pick up Amhara names, and they are forced to speak only Amharic, though they never stop using their own language. In other words, name-changing marks a shift in identity. This is a dialogic rejoinder to Wariyo's point that name-changing involves identity disruption. At this moment, Wariyo is in a subordinate position and cannot speak up or oppose the practice. The ceremony in which Sandaba's name is changed can be read as a dialogic

[121] '*Lammata namni tokko maqaa fokkisaa Sandaabaa jedhuun akka isa hin waamne*' (48).
[122] Sintolinna's name is not changed, only modified to Sihine.

response to the *Gubbisa* ceremony described by Wariyo, a narrative balancing act between two cultural practices of naming, so that the novel refrains from promoting a single culture. As mentioned earlier, this is also an example of how dialogism works in the novel— to juxtapose opposing views in order to build a polyphonic characteristics novel.

Several years later, the issue of name changing resurfaces again, in the same chapter. This time, the politics behind the practice is more explicit and direct and shows how the Oromo naming culture is being totally destroyed over time. By now, Sandaba has finished his high school and joined Haile Selassie I University while still living with his mother in Getaw's house, where a girl introduced as a relative of Lidya's also lives. The girl's name is Fiqir, and she is at high school. Sandaba and Fiqir are attracted to each other, and one day they sleep together. Fiqir gets pregnant and eventually gives birth to twin, while Getaw and Lidya have luckily already left to the United Kingdom for medical reasons. This relationship happens after Wariyo tells Fiqir that she was in fact born out of wedlock from Bethlehem, Lidya's younger sister, and an Oromo father, Gada Bultum, who was studying with Bethlehem at Haile Selassie I University in the 1950s. Bethlehem had died in childbirth, but the baby, Fiqir, had survived and was brought up by Lidya. According to Wariyo, Lidya has been hiding this story from Fiqir as she does not want Oromo blood in her aristocrat family. In Lidya's eyes, Fiqir repeated the history of her late mother when she slept with Sandaba.

When the Getaws come back from abroad, Wariyo and Sintolinna devise a mechanism to save Sandaba: they take the babies to their home; Sintolinna pretends to be the mother and takes the opportunity to disclose her relationship with Wariyo, which had already started when Sintolinna joined the family. Getaw's workers also agree to hide the truth from Lidya for fear of the consequences and because of their love for Fiqir. Upon the Getaws' return from London, Wariyo organizes a naming ceremony in line with the Borana tradition (though actually not congruent with the Borana tradition that

Wariyo has told us earlier, a point I return to below). Lidya attends the ceremony, and when she hears that Wariyo has given the babies Oromo names (Alkuma and Alkitil), her remarks reveal once again her unfavourable attitude towards non-Amhara culture:

> What an uncivilized mind you [Wariyo] have! Have you not become civilized yet? Why are you giving these cute babies such ugly names? No, these should not be their names. They should be called Kefale and Dubale, or Carew and Sharew, or Nadew and Natew, or Latarge and Tsatarge, Andarge and Adafire, Felleqe and Zelleqe, Asmare and Amare, or Ashebir and Amberbir'. She listed Amhara names. Then she added, 'I prefer Asmare and Amare.'[123]

Both pairs of the names, those given by Wariyo and those given by Lidya, have no political undertones.[124] But the narrator tells us that Lidya's intervention in naming practices is a violation of the Borana tradition, in which women are not allowed to give names. Wariyo cannot object to this violation due to his subordinate position in the family and his socio-political status. Still, Wariyo, Sintolinna and Sandaba covertly decide that the boys' names will remain Alkitil and Alkuma, though they overtly agree to keep the Amhara names given by Lidya, just as they did when Wariyo secretly enrolled Sandaba at school with his Oromo name.

Lidya's rejection of the Oromo names and her choice of Amhara names hints at the prejudice inherent in the narrative of the Great Tradition towards Oromo culture. Her disparagement of Wariyo's inability to assimilate himself to the 'civilized' Amhara culture reflects what the proponents of the Great Tradition think about non-Amhara people. The first two sentences in her remark—'*taaxiboo ciqaa*' and 'have not you been civilized yet?' signal that Wariyo, her subordinate, has been unable to become 'civilized' in accordance with the expectation of the Great Tradition. Instead of becoming

---

[123] *'Ayii! Taaxiboo ciqaa! Ati ammallee hinqaroome! Ijoollee babareedoo kana fafakkaatan maqaa fokkisaa akkasiitti moggaastaa? Lakkii maqaan isaanii kana hintahu. Kaffaalee fi Dubbaalee, ykn Caarewu fi Shaarewu, ykn Naadewu fi Naaxewu, ykn Laaxxiargee fi Tsaxxiaargee ykn Andaargee fi Addaafiree ykn Fallaqaa fi Zallaqaa ykn Asmaaree fi Amaaree ykn Ashebirii fi Amberbir' […] Itti fufanis ,' Ani gama kootiin Amaaree fi Asmaaree jedheera' jechuudhaan moggaasan'* (65).

[124] Alkitil and Alkuma mean a million times and a thousand times respectively.

assimilated, as Lidya expected, he is found still practising his Oromo culture. Not practicing Amhara culture—naming culture in this context—is uncivilized and dirty, as the metaphor (*taaxiboo ciqaa*) indicates. In Amharic '*taaxiboo*' means 'that which has been washed' or 'clean' and symbolizes living in the Amhara way, while '*ciqaa*' means 'mud' or 'dirty' and stands for a person who does not live in the Amhara way—the dichotomy in the phrase '*taaxiboo ciqaa*' aptly shows the hierarchy.

In the meantime, the narrator's mention that the naming ceremony follows Borana culture while it contradicts the naming ceremonies among the Borana that Wariyo explains to Getaw while they travel from Harar to Addis Ababa suggests that Wariyo has become detached from his indigenous culture. Wariyo himself does not abide by the Borana naming tradition, since the names he gives to the babies are not in accordance with the Borana culture he described earlier. This detachment from (or forgetfulness about) his culture can be the result of his long time living outside the Borana community. By presenting the impact of the Amhara administration on an Oromo family in this way, the novel sheds the light on how the assimilation strategies promoted by Amhara characters whose views represent the Great Tradition. At the same time, the novel presents silence—Wariyo's implicit refusal of the Amhara names—as a mode of resistance.

To go back to the discussion between Wariyo and Getaw, it raises other issues of relevance to counter-hegemonic narratives such as language ideology and the Oromo socio-political structure. Wariyo draws on his personal experience of reading and listening to international media outlets. He presents the larger socio-cultural and political elements that he believes differentiate the Oromo from the Amhara to argue that the Amhara's justification for their expansion as a 'civilizing mission' is not grounded. He discusses two aspects of the Oromo history. First, the history of the Oromo indigenous way of life before Menelik's occupation, and second, the history of

Oromo nationalism. Wariyo tells Getaw that the Oromo have their own traditional annual calendar which is quite different from that of the Amhara (*YL* 31).[125] He then describes in detail the Oromo *Gadaa* egalitarian governing system. He explains how the system functions, how power is shared, and how responsibilities are divided among the community leaders at different leadership stages. He stresses on the procedure for power transition among the Oromo, which takes place every eight years without dispute, unlike the Amhara, where one king rebels and overthrows the other. Wariyo goes further to claim that Western democracy derives from the Oromo *Gadaa* system, a point which Getaw finds so ridiculous that he upbraids Wariyo: 'How dare you speak, Wariyo? It was we who taught you even how to dress yourselves. Had we not civilized you, you would never have dressed like this'.[126] This dialogic interaction, enhanced through the use of counter questions and Getaw's strong opposition, helps outline the difference between the narrative of the Great Tradition and counter-hegemonic histories. Getaw's points echo the views of the Amhara characters in *Yeburqa Zimita*, something I return to in my comparison at the end. On his part, Wariyo rejects Getaw's claims as unfounded and advances counter-claims about Oromo achievements: he argues that the Oromo crafted clothes before the Amhara came to the Oromo lands; they built houses, practiced sedentary agriculture, defended themselves with traditional weapons, healed themselves with indigenous treatments, and so on. He eventually acknowledges that the Oromo adapted some dishes from the Amhara (*YL* 33-5).

At the end, Wariyo apologises to his master—a return to the power hierarchy between the two. His apology indicates that Wariyo is aware that Getaw is unusual among the

[125] The Oromo new year begins in January, not in September, and the calendrical year is not divided into weeks but rather months and days, with each day of the month carrying a specific name, Wariyo says (p. 31).

[126] '*Akkam akkam haasoftaa Waariyoo? Uffata uffachuullee nutu isinitti agarsiise malee utuu nuuti isin hinqaroomsin akkas hin uffattan turre*' (p. 33).

Amhara because of his kindness and knowledge of Oromo culture, otherwise it would be impossible to express such ideas in the presence of the Amhara rulers. Getaw's kind nature and relative knowledge about Oromo culture are elements that allow space for such an open discussion in the text, and for Wariyo's espousal of Oromo traditions and world views. Though Wariyo is the dominant narrator in this scene, Getaw and Sintolinna also take turns on occasion. In particular, Getaw, whose views are seriously challenged by his subordinate, occasionally poses questions which reflect the view of the Great Tradition. In short, the aspects of Oromo culture and tradition that Wariyo brings up are usually excluded from the Ethiopian cultural and political history, in which the Oromo are presented as people without history and without a sophisticated culture. This is why the naming practices and other socio-cultural practices that Wariyo raises set up an Oromo counter-hegemonic narrative.

Amhara elites usually reduce Oromo nationalism to a mere political pursuit by the Oromo elites; by contrast, Wariyo illuminates the history of Oromo nationalism as a central and long-standing concern among the Oromos (see Ezekiel 2016). Before, I discuss Wariyo's narrative on the topic, let me show how the novel first lays the ground for such a narrative shift in representing the victims of the Amhara administration. Two statues built in a memory of the *neftenya* leaders are mentioned in Chapter 2 as part of the story about the occupation of the Hararge; one of them is an equestrian statue of *Ras* Mekonnin Welde Micha'el, a photograph of which is reproduced in the chapter (*YL* 15). Mekonnin was one of the prominent war leaders who played a crucial role in occupying the Hararge region. When describing Sintolinna's attempt to escape after her husband has murdered his master, we are told that Sintolinna sits in the shade of a tree in front of Mekonnin's statue to protect herself from the scorching sun, waiting for a car to leave the town. Sintolinna knows nothing, the narrator tells us, about the statue though she always passes it whenever she goes to market. The narrator then comments on the purpose and the political meaning of the statue:

> Sintolinna did not know the double meaning of the statue of *Ras* Mekonnin. On the one hand, for the Oromo it is a memorial reminding them that they lost their land and were forcibly subdued under the *neftenya* administration. On the other hand, for the *neftenyas* it is a sign of victory and marks their successful occupation of the Oromo lands. So many people do not know that a similar statue [of Emperor Menelik] in Addis Ababa, in front of the St. Georgis Church, also has such a double meaning.[127]

In commenting on the meaning of the statue of Mekonnin in Harar for the Oromo, the narrator mentions the more controversial statue of Emperor Menelik in Addis Ababa. By recognising those martyred while resisting the Amhara forces later in the novel, the narrator makes space for the Oromo perspective of the memorial statues. As the last sentence above indicates, Sintolinna is not alone in her ignorance of the political meanings of the statues. In line with contextual narratology, her ignorance can be explained in two ways: it reflects her disinterest in politics, noted on several occasions, but it can also be an example of the loss of collective memory, given that counter-narratives about the historical significance of such statues were suppressed under Haile Selassie's regime.

Against this background, Wariyo presents the history of the Oromo nationalists who prepared the ground for contemporary Oromo nationalism. He counters the Amhara dismissal of Oromo nationalism in two ways. First, he reactivates the silenced period in Ethiopian history of the Italian occupation (1936-41) for the sake of Oromo political history. In this period, the Oromo leaders in the western Ethiopia came together, formed the Western Oromo Confederation, and presented their concerns to the British consulate in the western Ethiopia and Sudan, asking it to help them contact the League

---

[127] *'Raas Mokonnoon Harargee gabroomsuu irratti qooda olaanaa waan rawwataniif yaadannoodhaaf siidaan fard (sic) irra taa'anii muldhatan kun isaanii dhaabbate [...] Siidaan kun Oromootaaf mallattoo itti injifatamanii lafti irraa fudhatamee sirna Nafxanyaa jala humnaan galan kan itti agarsiisu si'a ta'u sirna Nafxanyaaf ammoo mallattoo itti injifatee biyya Oromoo itti qabate kan agarsiisu ta'uu isaa Siintolinnaan hinbeektu. Siidaan kana fakkaatu handhura Oromiyaa kan taate Finfinnee bataskaana Goorgisii fuullee jirus mallattummaan isaa kana ta'uu namooti baay'een hin beekan'* (p.15-6).

of Nations. Unfortunately, the British official they contacted did not help them, for reasons that Wariyo does not mention here.[128] Second, Wariyo tells the history of the Oromo patriots who, during Haile Selassie's regime, fought for the cause of their people but were punished as power-hungry rebels. For him, these so-called 'rebels' were patriots who should be honoured, he tells his stepson Sandaba, a university student by then. The topic is presented in the form of an informal family discussion. One Sunday, Wariyo, Sintolinna and Fiqir drink coffee under the shade of the building in which Fiqir lives. Like any other weekend, this Sunday, Sandaba arrives home from the university while coffee is ready to be served. Sintolinna tells him, 'you will live longer for you arrive while we are talking about your name',[129] prompting Sandaba to say that he loves his original name, given to him by his father Yadanno.

He then goes on to tell them about how Haile Selassie's government is oppressive towards the Oromo and mentions the vastness of the Oromo language, spoken by more peoples than any other Ethiopian language but denied recognition by the Amhara rulers. He ends with the question '*yoomi laataa?*', 'when shall we be free?' and voices his curiosity for an organized commitment of the Oromo to the struggle towards liberation. The question prompts further discussion, which allows Wariyo to share his experiences of the history of the organized Oromo struggle. Here Wariyo explicitly refers to his knowledge and experiences that qualify him to talk on the topic. He tells Sandaba: 'As far as the Oromo unified struggle for their rights is concerned, I have some knowledge. You are too young so that you may not know this history. I have better knowledge about the history of the Oromo struggle. […] when the Macca-Tulama Association

[128] The Oromo historian Ezekiel Gebissa (2002), who has studied this period, comments that, 'In refusing even to inform the League and to assume the responsibility of helping the Western Oromo achieve self-rule, the British acted in a way that would maintain their strategic alliance with Italy. European peace was more important for Britain than the liberation of an African people' (p.89).
[129] '*Umriin kee dheeraadha. Utuu waa'ee maqaa kee haasofnuu dhufte*' (p.66).

founded, I was the first member'.[130] This change in narration mode, from homodiegetic (Sandaba) to auto diegetic narrator (Wariyo) is a strategy that the novel uses to increase the historical authenticity of the narrative.

Wariyo says that he has first-hand knowledge as a founding member of the first influential association established in Ethiopia to press for Oromo freedom. This was ostensibly a self-help, apolitical association, yet its members clandestinely used it for political purposes. At no time, Wariyo claims, have the Oromo submitted silently to the Amhara administration. He narrates the history of two other associations formed to promote Oromo nationalism and mobilize the Oromo people towards their political goals. In spite of the strict censorship of Haile Selassie government's, the Macca-Tulama Association, he explains, had the greatest impact and formed the basis for Oromo nationalism, and its members have paid a huge price. Wariyo lists the names of the historical Oromo patriots active in the association and sacrificed their lives, including Hailemariam Gamada, Mamo Mezamir, Captain Seyfu Tasemma, Brigadier General Dawiti Abdi, Agare Tullu, Haji Simbiro, Haji Robale Ture, Haji Adam Sado, and General Taddesse Birru.[131] Some of them were executed in the prison cells, others were tried and hanged publicly, and the rest died from illness behind the bars. Wariyo explains the contribution that each of these patriots is known for in Oromo history.

He speaks at greatest length about General Taddesse Birru, a general loyal to Haile Selassie who nonetheless wanted the Oromo to gain equal benefits to the Amhara and, as a result, led an initiative to help the Oromo get educated under a scheme developed by Haile Selassie's government. Taddesse was very close to Haile Selassie's government and refused to join the Oromo association in its early years, but changed

[130] '*Waa'ee gurmuudhaan socho'uu ani waanan beeku qaba. Atillee ijoollee kaleessaa waan taateef kana beekuu dhiisuu dandeessaa. Sirra anatu seenaa qabsoo Oromootaa beekaa…Bara waldaan Maccaa fi Tuulamaa hundeeffame ani miseensa jalqabaati'* (p.67).

[131] We are not told if Sandaba, Sintolinna and Fiqir are familiar with these names. Fiqir explicitly asks Wariyo to explain to her in Amharic.

his mind, according to Wariyo, after Prime Minister Aklilu Habte told him not to encourage the Oromo to get educated.[132] As Taddesse told the Oromo in Arsi at a meeting, 'The *neftenya* ruling system wants the Oromo not to get a modern education so that they remain uneducated. The reason is that if they get educated, they will be more conscious about their identity. They will feel that they have been enslaved. They will then struggle for their liberation. And demand their rights.'[133] Taddesse continues to encourage the Oromo to get educated but is spied upon by government officials as he travels to support the literacy campaign. During the meeting with Oromo farmers in Arsi region, regional officials ask him if he had permission to hold the meeting. Taddesse's angry reply lands him in jail: 'Who did invite you here? Who permitted you to come to this meeting so that you could ask us if we have permission to get together in our *fatherland*?'[134] This idea of the fatherland (*biyya abbaa keenyaa*) contrasts starkly with the concept of the motherland in the Ethiopian Great Tradition. Though the narrator does not comment on Taddesse's utterance, it does focus on contests over land between the Oromo elite and the Amhara landlord, as I show in the next section.

Contextual narratology helps us frame this utterance, and Wariyo's narrative, in contrast to the dominant narrative Ethiopian history textbooks, which mention some of these events and figures but only as evidence of Oromo dissatisfaction with Haile Selassie's government, and not as part of a deep-rooted political quest. For example, the Oromo historical figures that Wariyo presents here are portrayed in the textbooks as

---

[132] *'Dhaga'i Taaddasa ati yefidel saraawitii amma jalqabne kana sababii godhattee ummata hundaan baradhaa jettee dadammaqsaa jirta. Baradhaa jechuun gaariidha. Nuti ammoo ummata Gaallaa kana wallaalummaa keessatti tursinee waggoota dhibba ofi duubatti hambisne malee isaan galaanaadha. Nuliqimsuu danda'uu. Waan kana ta'eef yeroo waa'ee barumsaa dubbattu kanas yaadachuu fi hubachuu qabda.'(p.74)*

[133] *'Sirni bittaa nafxanyaa ummati Oromoo barumsaan akka boodatti hafu barbaada. Sababiin kanaas ummati kun yoo barate of bara. Gabroomuun isaa itti dhagahama. Bilisummaaf qabsaa'a. Mirga isaa gaafata'* (p.76).

[134] *'Nuti biyya abbaa keenyaa keessatti walga'ii godhachuuf eenyuu akka hayyama nuukenne nu gaafachuu keessan dura isin naannoo walga'ii kana akka dhuftan eenyu isinii eeyyame? Eenyutu isin waamee?'* (p.77).

rebels who were eliminated by Emperor Haile Selassie and later by President Mengistu. By contrast, in Wariyo's narration, their true motivation is Oromo nationalism, and they resist the systematic ethnic marginalization and oppression targeted at the Oromo people. In short, this is how the novel re-interprets the representation of the Oromo in the national historiography or foregrounds the other side of the same story told by mainstream historians. The second historical strand that *Yoomi Laataa?* pursue regards Ethiopian history after 1974 Revolution, with particular reference to Oromo history and perspectives, again by focusing on Sandaba and his family, and on Sintolinna.

2.3 (Re)storying history in the era of identity politics: Ethiopian history after the 1974 revolution

Yoomi Laataa?'s focus on the Oromo during the Derg period is a new phenomenon in Oromo and Amharic literatures and in national historiography: most Amharic novels about this era focus on the northern regions, mainly Eritrea and Tigray.[135] In these works, the Eritreans and Tigrayans are presented as the victims of the Civil War and violence of the Derg administration as presented by several Amharic novels including *Yeburqa Zimita*. *Yoomi Laataa?* instead shifts spatial and thematic focuses to the eastern, central and western Ethiopia so as to show how the people living in these regions and in towns like Harar, Addis Ababa and Naqamte, mainly the Oromo, were brutally affected. The history of this period was marked by a heightened sense of identity politics, first articulated in the 1960s during the Ethiopian Students' Movement.[136] Under the Derg dictatorship, this fervent identity politics eventually led to the socio-political turmoil that the historians call the Ethiopian Civil War.

---

[135] Amharic novels like *Oromai* by Baalu Girma (1983) and *The Evil Days* by Mulugeta Guddeta (2008).
[136] The common work that mostly mentioned by scholars is Walelign Mekonini's article in which he articulated the Ethiopian multiculturalism was really under the Amhara cultural hegemony.

Identity politics are reflected in the formation of the political parties under ethnic names (OLF, TPLF and EPLF), which the Derg targeted. The politics of time impact the content and form of *Yoomi Laataa?* In the novel, the main focus of Oromo history during the Derg era is political and cultural nationalism, expressed at cultural events such as festivals and ceremonies, which have become the conduits for political activists to spread their message to the larger Oromo public, since the government does not allow them to do in other ways. As the songs presented by *Yoomi Laataa?* show, their main concerns were creating awareness through the reappropriation of historical narratives and the fostering of unity among the Oromo. In the novel, songs by Oromo cultural troupes and individual artists are complemented by speeches of lead characters like Eliyas and Sandaba, which also articulate key historical and political themes. At other times, the characters voice personal memories, usually in internal monologues. The novel also narrates the arbitrary persecution and extra-judiciary killings committed by the Derg on the Oromo.

With the coming of Mengistu Hailemariam to the power, we are told in Chapter 3, the political situation in Ethiopia changed dramatically, particularly thanks to Mengistu's policies on land, ethnic and linguistic rights. Most of the policies were never put into practice, though. Narratively speaking, the change in the political situation is reflected in shifts in focalization (both the focalizor and the focalized change) and in narrators, and in the selection of several new topics.[137] Plotwise, the shift in political ideology that comes about after the regime change splits the main plotline into two, following the dispersion of Getaw's family and workers. Accordingly, two plots are interwoven over the next 12 chapters. Sandaba's political career and his life in exile are presented in Chapters 5,7,8, and 14. After he graduates from Haile Selassie I University, Sandaba is

[137] For example, the dominant intradiegetic and (homodiegetic) narrator, Wariyo, turns to business following the death of his master and the relocation of his foster son Sandaba to Wallaga for work and in order to advance his political career.

drawn into politics and joins the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle (EOPRS), which advocates equality among all the nations in Ethiopia under the unitary government of Mengistu Hailemariam. Sandaba clashes with Derg officials over his commitment to promote the culture, language and history of the Oromo people, and when he realizes that the Derg government is unwilling to recognize the rights and demands of his people, he joins the armed struggle led by the Oromo Liberation Front. During this time, he works and lives in Wallaga, where the armed struggle enjoys popular support and has developed a strong base. Eventually Sandaba escapes to Sudan, where the Oromo armed forces are based and are fighting the Derg on the western side of Ethiopia.

Chapters 12 and 14 connect the two plots as Sandaba's twins are conscripted by the Derg government's national army, which lead to their reunion with him in Khartoum, with the help of Sandaba's former Eritrean colleague, Saba, who meets the sons by chance in Sudan in a refugee camp; this in turn results in Sandaba's reunion with Saba. The relationship between Saba and Sandaba is a textual representation of the alliance between Oromo and Eritrean liberation fighters. The other plotline follows the ordeals of Sintolinna, her other children (Obsine and Obsa), her former husband Yadanno (who she meets after her return to Hararge), Sandaba's wife Fiqir and her twin, Alkitil and Alkuma, under the Derg dictatorship (Chapters 6, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 15). Most of these chapters revolve around people not affiliated to any party are tormented by the government merely because of the Derg officials' suspicion towards them. The two plotlines are connected through characters who shift from one plot to the other, mainly Eliyas Hordofa—a friend of Sandaba's who later joins and shares the travails of Sandaba's family and Sintolinna—and Sandaba's children, as already mentioned.

My discussion focuses on the two protagonists of this part of the novel, Sandaba Yadanno and Eliyas Hordofa. I analyse the speeches they make on some formal and

informal occasions, their dialogue with other characters, and their internal dialogism. Besides, unlike in the first three chapters, the novel draws significantly on historical songs (i.e., songs on historical topics) sung at cultural festivals, is another focus of my analysis. There are about ten songs by the Oromo artists and cultural troupes presented in this section of the novel. These songs do not focus on single topic, but rather present an array of political and historical themes and events. Here I focus only on a few historical songs, and I discuss other songs in Chapter 4. Through dialogues between characters, speeches, and personal and collective memories of the characters, major themes in Oromo history like land ownership, linguistic and ethnic identity, the threats to the Oromo unity, and the quest for political organization under which the Oromo unify themselves are presented.

The narrator first introduces the policy reforms by the Derg government, notably the use of other major Ethiopian languages in the national media and the banning of the pejorative names for ethnic groups, before zooming in on the topic of land ownership and its larger political implications (*YL*, Ch.4). Of all the reforms, land reform proves the most controversial with the Amhara landlords, who refuse to accept it because they do not want to lose the lands they control. The topic is discussed in a debate between Sandaba and Befirdu, an Amhara landlord.[138] We are in the early Derg years, when the government has stepped up its attacks on pro-Haile Selassie groups and eliminated many of them. In addition to what he learns at school, under Wariyo's supervision, Sandaba grows up informed about the causes and concerns of the Oromo people under successive Ethiopian regimes. Sandaba is one of the university students recruited by the government for its literacy campaign and to follow up the implementation of the land

[138] We may recall that the dispute over land was first briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, when the meaning of Sintolinna's name is explained (see above).

reform. He is sent to Gudar village in central Ethiopia, about 100 km west of Addis Ababa.

One day, as Sandaba and two friends are walking through the village, they come across Befirdu, who is already angry at the land reform policy which has resulted in the confiscation of his land and who now wants to provoke the students overseeing the policy implementation. After an exchange of insults, Befirdu and Sandaba turn to debate land ownership. Befirdu criticizes all the policy reforms, including language policy, and he claims that it was the Amhara emperors who saved the land from the foreign invaders. At that point Sandaba replies: 'This land, which you lord over, belongs to the Oromo people. It is you who came to them. The Oromo did not come to you'.[139] Sandaba then moves back to the history of the occupation of the Oromo land and argues that the Amhara coming to the Oromo land was an unjustifiable invasion:

> The blood that Emperor Menelik shed was Oromo blood, not yours. Why is your blood shed in Oromia? Why did you come here? Does your boundary reach here? What did you do at Anole in Arsi, at Calanqo in Hararge, and at Embabo in Wallaga? Why did you go there at all? Do you share any boundary with Calanqo in Hararge or Anole in Arsi, or here with Jibat and Maca? Why did you come here? Is your father's land here? You dispute with us over the land that never belonged to you.[140]

This contestation over the real geographies carries different political significance for Befirdu and Sandaba. The places Sandaba mentions—Anole, Embabo and Calanqo—are real significant geographies for the proponents of the Great Tradition like Befirdu, and for the supporters of the Oromo counter-hegemonic narrative like Sandaba. In the national historiography (like Bahiru's history book discussed in Ch. 1), these are

---

[139] *'Biyya qabattanii gooftaa abbaa lafaa itti taatan kun kan Oromoodha. Isintu itti dhufe malee inni isinitti hindhufne'* (p.103).

[140] *'Dhiigi Minilk dhangalaasan sun kan keessan utuu hinta'in dhiiga Oromootaadha. Dhiigi keessan Oromiyaa keessatti maaliif dhangala'aa? Daangaa biyya keessaniittu as gahaa Maal gochuuf dhuftanii? Arsii Aanole irratti, Harargee Calanqoo irratti. Wallaggaa Imbaaboo irratti gochi raawwattan maal turee? Maal gochuuf dhaqxanii? Daangaa biyya keessantu Harargee Calanqoodha moo? Arsii Anooleedhaa moo as Jibaatii fi Maccaadhaa? As maaliif dhuftanii? Asii biyyi abbaa keessan? Iddoo keessan malee dhuftanii nutti falmaa jirtu'* (pp.103-4).

important places in the formation of the Ethiopian empire. The battles that happened there are remembered as markers of victory, and it was as a result of them that the country—meaning the Ethiopian empire—was formed. For the Oromo people, places like Calanqo have become symbols of the death of their freedom, symbolized by the death of the early Oromo fighter Walabuma, as I noted in the previous section. If Calanqo means the death of freedom for the Oromo of Hararge, Embabo has the same ring for the Wallaga, and Anole for the Arsi. In short, these places are memorable in marking the collapse of the Oromo once and for all. Thereafter, the Oromo land became contested between the two camps of the invaders and the Oromo. Another important point in Sandaba's utterance is the mention of 'Oromia' as a conceptual significant geography, which the Derg government does not recognise, and the concept of the 'fatherland', which reflects a future vision of Oromo nationalism.

As the narrative develops over the course of the Derg era, we hear Sandaba and Eliyas talk about the ordeals of the Oromo under the *neftenya* system (including under the Derg government), and how the Oromo will/need to liberate themselves from the Amhara domination, able to use their language in government jobs, media and in schools (see Ch. 3), have equal political representation, and promote and develop their culture. In the next section, I focus on two public events that Eliyas and Sandaba use to present their views about Oromo political history in the context of Ethiopian national history. I pick two points for further discussion from these events. One is Eliya's remark about people who work internally against Oromo unity, known as the Gobanas after the Oromo man, *Ras* Gobana, who helped the Menelik's occupation of the Oromo lands. The other is the way in which songs articulate important historical themes and events.

2.4 Cultural events as a conduit of counter-hegemonic narratives

Let me first provide the narrative and political context to these cultural entertainments and festivals. Once the Derg government steps up its attacks on affluent aristocratic families in Addis Ababa, Getaw, his family and staff are targeted. When he moves to the Wallaga region of Oromia, Sandaba leaves his wife Fiqir and children behind in Addis Ababa with his mother and his stepfather Wariyo. Because of her relationship with Getaw, Fiqir is targeted by Derg officials and is twice arrested. Fearing for her life, she decides to join her husband in Naqamte, the capital of the Wallaga region in western Ethiopia. Her move from Addis Ababa to Wallaga introduces Naqamte as a new real significant geography and a centre of Oromo culture revival, though Naqamte is always absent from the Great Tradition history and from Amharic historical novels. This spatial shift is marked by difference in basic infrastructure and cultural facilities which, intended to show how Wallaga has been marginalized and underdeveloped by the Amhara administration. Fiqir, who is experiencing a shift in identity after she was told that by Wariyo that she was born from an Oromo father, is the focalizor here. When she arrives in Naqamte (in September 1978, YL 134), she is amazed by the huge disparity in living conditions compared to Addis Ababa. Among other things, Naqamte lacks in recreational places and media entertainment such as television and cinema, which Fiqir used to enjoy in Addis Ababa. Fiqir comes to understand how the Ethiopian government has been oppressive towards the Oromo, but she never regrets for being an Oromo. She quickly learns Afan Oromo and assimilated herself to the Oromo community in Naqamte.

One way in which Oromo political elites used the cultural events to develop unity among different Oromo groups that the novel thematises are the tours of Oromo cultural troupes based in Addis Ababa and Harar to the western regions of Ethiopia, including Naqamte. One of such a troupe is the Adu Birra Orchestra, a cultural troupe

based in the eastern region of Hararge, which is visiting Naqamte. A cultural event is arranged upon the arrival of the Adu Birra, and a very large number of people come to attend, too many in fact to be accommodated inside the hall. Eight songs are performed at this event, with the general purpose, the narrator informs us, to invoke the spirit of Oromo nationalism, and specifically to foster unity among the Oromos, to warn about the danger of infiltrators like the Gobanas, to evoke memories of oppression, and other such political themes. The songs are performed by individual members of the orchestra. Here is one song sung by Gaddisa Abdullahi:

We have our own culture, but we have lost our culture
We have our own language, but we have lost our language
We have our own country, but we have lost our country
We are dispersed like the leaves of a tree
When one sun sets, another rises
But there is no one like us harmed by servitude
The moon never lightens during the daytime, the night never becomes the day,
The son of the oppressor can never be a friend.
The life of misery is worrisome
As we toil the whole day, we tire at the night
We do not need anybody else's land, only our own
We are enslaved by the father but will not allow the son to inherit us
Though he is called an unshakable mountain, unfortunately he was overthrown
The son whose father was an oppressor unfortunately betrayed us.[141]

---

[141] *Utuu aadaa qabnuu aadaa kenya dhabnee*
Utuu afaan qabnuu afaan keenya dhabnee
Utuu biyya qabnuu biyya keenya dhabnee
Akka baala mukaa gargar facaanee.
Aaduun takka dhiitee takkaas nuuf barite
Kan akka keenya hin jiru kan gabrummaan mite.
Ji'i guyyaa hin bahu halkan guyyaa hin tahu
Ilmi abbaa cunquursaa waa fira nuun tahu.
Jiruun gabrummaadhaa kan nama yaachistu
Guyyaanis carraaqaa halkan nama hinraffistu.
Biyya keenya malee kan namaa hinbarbaadnu
Abbaadhaaf gabroomne ilmaan hindhaalamnu.
Gaara jedhuun illee bar gara galuu hin oolle
Ilmi abbaa cunqursaa nama ganuu hin oolle.
(p.137)

The song begins by recalling collective memory and presenting the loss of 'our' culture, land and language; the song then focuses on the lack of unity, the absence of change in the oppressive administration, the ruler's undependability, land claims, the continued enslavement, and the reversal of Mengistu's promised democratic process. The song clearly mentions the political problems the Oromo people have faced under different regimes. The singer uses the symbol of the tree leaves scattering to reflect the disintegration and lack of unity among the Oromo; culture, language and a country/state of one's own are important to maintain/create unity among the Oromo. The regular rising and setting of the sun and the irreversible order of nature symbolize the continuity of oppression across different regimes. The song is performed in 1978, during the regime of Mengistu Hailemariam, the successor of Haile Selassie, but he is referred to as the 'son of the oppressor', and as endorsing the oppressive legacy of the former emperors. Repetition as a literary device in lines 6, 9 and 10 emphasises the impact of the hardships brought about by life under slavery. Lines 11 and 12 clarify what the Oromo fight for (their land) and against (continued domination).[142] The singer's use of the first-person plural pronoun 'we' indicates his affiliation with the audience, and after the song, the narrator tells, 'the participants from Naqamte shed tears while they give prizes to the singers' (p.138).

The second cultural event presented in the chapter is an entertainment event by the local Wallaga Cultural Troupe, established with the help of Sandaba and Eliyas. The troupe plays a significant role in the Oromo culture revival in Naqamte. As there is a shortage of entertainment in the town, the narrator tells, a large group of the people attend the weekend events the cultural troupe organizes, and the songs presented by

[142] One may wonder who the oppressive father and son the singer repeatedly refers to are. From the Oromo perspective, Abyssinian oppression peaked under Emperor Menelik and was continued by his successors. Menelik is usually referred to as the oppressive father of his successors. In the context of this song, the oppressive father is likely to be Haile Selassie, for it is his long-lived regime (1930-74) that is symbolized by an 'unshakable' mountain, as we read in line 12.

the cultural troupe play both an entertainment and a political role. This event is led by Eliyas, whose remarks carry historical significance. He speaks about the impact of the Oromo who work for the Derg government and who can become a living threat to the Oromo nationalism. The historical figure of *Ras* Gobana Dace is invariably invoked in this context, and people who claim to be Oromo but put their personal advantage before the interest of their people are called 'Goobanoota' (the Gobanas) in Afan Oromo. The author had presented the story of the Gobanas in the preface, when stressing the importance of history for an oppressed people: 'The Oromo who contributed to our oppression by the past *neftenya* system, like *Ras* Gobana, were not few in number.'[143]

During the Derg regime, denouncing the Gobanas became part of the Oromo political discourse, with Oromo politicians, artists and leaders calling for unity among the different Oromo groups and warn against infiltrators. The novel echoes these warnings in this section. The entertainment event begins with Eliyas's remark denouncing the Gobanas and those engaged in similar political opportunism: 'We should not forget that the Oromo were not enslaved only by the might of the *neftenya's* firearms but also by the assistance of traitors like *Ras* Gobana. Emperor Haile Selassie also used the Gobanas of his era just as Emperor Menelik had done' (*YL* 137). These remarks create a dialogic interaction between Esayas's remarks in the preface: Eliyas's remark is a rejoinder to the author and anticipates the singer's response, who dialogically responds to him through the song. Two more songs further expand Eliyas's view on the Gobanas, one performed on by the Oromo singer Terfasa Mitiku (a real person). Terfasa's tone is more serious than Elyas's, and he directly calls on the audience to take the necessary punitive measures:

[143] *'Sirnooti Nafxanyaa dabran roorroo nurratti raawwatan tumsuudhaan Oromooti lammii isaanii miidhan laakkofsi isaanii xiqqaa miti. Kan akka Raas Goobanaafaa…*(p.4).

Greetings to you all!
Who have survived to date
throughout the struggle.
Do you know each other, all of you?
Your enemy is among you!
Now is the time for you
To expel your enemy.
Do you know Gobana?
The one who exchanges his people
In favour of money.
Uproot him and burn him up!
O Oromo,
oppressed nation!
Your heart is damaged by the grudge it harbours.
Your enemy shelters under your armpit,
Be strong, rise up against it![144]

Terfasa addresses the audience as survivors of the struggle; his question is a political one that seeks to activating political consciousness. He does not historicize the Gobanas but powerfully defines what being a Gobana means (line 6). Through the repeated use of the second person pronoun, Terfasa establishes a dialogic interaction with his audience.[145] He enhances this strategy by posing direct rhetoric questions: 'Do you know each other?' and 'Do you know Gobana?' (*YL* 139, lines 3 and 6). How effective this dialogic interaction is revealed by the reference to the audience clapping and

---

[144] '*Ashamaa isin hundi keessanii*
Warri waldhaansoon yoona geessanii
Walbeektuu isin hundi keessaanii
Sin keessa jirti diinni keessanii
Of keessaa baasaa yeroon keessanii
Beettuu Goobanaa?
Bitamtuu horii gurgurtuu sabaa
Ciraa balleessaa abiddaan gubaa
Saba Oromoo! Yaa cunqurfamaa!
Garaan madaa'ee kan kuuse malaa
Jirti diinnikee bobaakee jalaa
Jabaadhuu… ka'ii….' (139).

[145] I took the idea about the use of pronouns in understanding narratives from Kim (1999), Marcus (2008) and Margolin (2000).

weeping, a reaction attributable, on the one hand, to the sensitivity and political importance of the themes addressed by the singer, and on the other hand, to his intensely dialogic presentation strategy, which enables him to arouse strong emotions in his audience. Dialogism here, then, is used to establish connection between the speaker and his audience so that they both work towards one common goal, fighting the enemy within.

One more song from this event is worth discussing. It is by an Oromo woman (real) singer, Ilfinesh Qanno. Though the novel does not tell us, she is a supporter of the OLF and known for her the protest songs among the Oromo community. This is one of her popular songs:

A huge burden fell over us
Nothing will liberate us except the gun, will it?
We were dispersed […]
But how did we find one another?
It took us many years.
I have a message for you, Oromo children,
How come our history gets lost?
They change the names of places
They changed Adama to Nazreth
They christen and change names like
Tolasa and Badhasa to Christian names.[146]

The song directly calls practices of name changing of places and people a deliberate state policy leading to the loss of cultural and historical memory among the Oromo. As we have seen, the topic of name changing is raised several times in the novel, with each

[146] *'nurratti jigee ture ba'aan guddaansaa*
Qawwee malee maaltu bilisa nubaasaa?
Gargar baanee turree […]
Attamiin wal barree?
Bara baayi'ee turre.
Dhaamsan sitti dhaama ilmaan Oromootaa
Akkamittiin baddi seenaan Oromootaa
Maqaa biyyaallee ni geeddaruu
Adaamaadhaan Naazireeti jedhanii
Tolasaa fi Badhaasaa Kiristinnaa kaasani…' (140).

scene presenting a particular aspect. By this point of the narrative, it has come to bear serious political overtones, as the song underlines. Though the Derg banned the derogatory names used by the *neftenyas* to address other ethnic groups since Menelik's time, the narrator tells us that the Derg government did not restore the original names of many cities and towns in the Oromo lands. Therefore, the grievance over the changed names of places and persons continues to be a part of Oromo counter-hegemonic narratives, and that is why, I would argue, it crops up in this song.

The last important cultural event that directly relates to counter-hegemonic narratives is the Inango *Gadaa* ceremony (presented in Ch. 8). Contextual narratology urges us to consider the historical and political context, which in this case relates to the move by the Derg, in the early 1980s, to eliminate all groups and individuals that it suspected to be working against its political ideologies, while Oromo political elites were busy with the culture revival ceremonies and festivals as political tool. This event in question is more impactful than any cultural festival, since the *Gadaa* system is the only cultural institution still believed to unify the Oromo. After the battle between Menelik's forces and the Oromo at Embabo in 1874, the system was destroyed in western Oromia, particularly in Wallaga.

The narrator tells us that, following the reforms of 1978, the Ethiopian Oppressed People Revolutionary Struggle (EOPRS), a political party chaired by Oromo political leader Baro Tumsa, arranged a *buttaa*[147] ceremony to be held at Inango, a small town in the Gimbi region of Wallaga. The Derg government allowed this ceremony to be held in order to gain support among the Oromo people, according to the narrator, but later

---

[147] *Buttaa* is an Oromo word and a part of Oromo socio-political and cultural system governing system called *Gadaa*. The novel has to say the following about *buttaa*: '*Gadaa Oromoo keessatti sirni buttaa utuu dhiigi hindhangala'in sirna nagaadhaan angoo mootummaa walitti dbarsaniidha …. sirni kun sirna angoo walarkaa fuudhuu fi dabarsuudha* (*YL* 150)' [In Oromo *Gadaa* system, *buttaa* is a system in which a leader peacefully transfers power to another leader…. It is a system of power transfer].

used the ceremony to eliminate its opponents. A large number of Oromo from nearby places such as Jimma, Naqamte, Arjo, Gimbi, Qellam, Horo Guduru, and Asosa have gathered. Sandaba is a key figure and keynote speaker at the ceremony. The ceremony opens with the elders' blessings; then Sandaba gives his speech, and the Wallaga Cultural Troupe presents several plays but only one recitative war song called *geerarsa*. My discussion focuses on Sandaba's speech and the *geerarsa* because of their historical and political significance as they present important points about the counter-hegemonic histories. In this particular context, the novel employs direct speech: Sandaba's speech, spreading over almost two pages, is quoted in full. It is dialogized so that double-voiced. The narrator introduces it by saying that Sandaba spoke boldly and seems desperate over the Derg dictatorship. This suggests that the speech will be a strong critique of the Derg government, with possibly tragic consequences. Yet the speech is not only about the Derg but offers a critique of the whole Amhara administration from Menelik to Mengistu. In the first section of his speech, Sandaba calls the Derg government a *neftenya* system, and says that 'the *neftenya* system fears the words ''freedom'' and "equality" like the spear, and labels groups that demand and struggle for these political rights a threat to the revolution, to the unity of the country, and calls them narrow-minded' (*YL* 152). He claims that no government in history has been able to deter a determined people from achieving their demand, and the case of the Oromo cannot be different. He then historicizes this claim by taking the examples of British colonies like India, Pakistan and South Africa, and tells us that these people lived under British colonial rule for over 300 years. No matter how the British forcibly suppressed these people and attempted to keep them their colonies, they did not succeed. Sandaba relates this colonial history to the Oromo case when he states that the Oromo were forced to live under the *neftenya*'s rule for 100 years. He once again takes the example of Pakistan and India to urge the Oromo to rise and fight, otherwise they will be enslaved for many more years.

He then turns to discuss the administrative system adopted by consecutive Ethiopian emperors: starting with Menelik up to the Mengistu's government, he tells the audience, they all followed the same trend, that is they kept the Oromo divided so that they can rule over them; only, now the Derg introduced a new strategy that it calls socialism to continue the *neftenya* system (Sandaba does not explain how socialism promotes the *neftenya* system *per se*). He concludes his speech by plainly telling the Oromo that they are living under domination and should stop asking 'when shall [freedom] be?' In fact, Sandaba also asks 'when shall it be that we become free from the iron chains that now we are tied up? Think of the answer! The answer is with you! It only requires the strength of our struggle'.[148] Sandaba's question, which is also the title of the novel (*yoomi laataa?*, when shall it be?), is contextualized dialogically in relation to the particular socio-political predicament of the Oromo people under the Derg government. This makes the novel not only historical, but also decidedly political.

Finally, the Oromo oral poetry called *geerarsa* (*YL* 153-6) that the Wallaga Cultural Troupe performs articulates several historical topics. *Geerarsa* is a heroic war song, as we shall see in Chapter 4, but I discuss it here because after Sandaba calls for the Oromo to take immediate action against the Derg government, the *geerarsa* purposefully evokes the spirit of war. The *geerarsa* has seven sections running over 4 pages: each section presents concerns of Oromo nationalism, which also relate to the major themes addressed by the novel, including the main question (when shall [freedom] be?) asked by the Oromo protagonists, Eliyas and Sandaba. The first section addresses the issue of unity: if unity is attained, it will a good time for the Oromo to fight and liberate themselves. This unity can be achieved under the jurisdiction of *Abbaa Gadaa*[149], who is

---

[148] '*yoomi laataa? kan hidhaa sibiilaa itti hidhamne keessaa baanuu? Mee deebii isaa itti yaadaa! [D]eebiin isaa isin bira jira! []abeenya qabsoo keenya gaafata….'*

[149] Abba *Gadaa* is the ultimate leader under the *Gadaa* system, to whom every Oromo should listen.

restored at the Inango celebration. The second section confirms that the Oromo identity long been assumed to have been destroyed by the *neftenya* rulers is still alive and defends itself. The third section directly articulates the question '*yoomi laataa?*', when shall it be? and contextualizes it within the century-long history of the Oromo occupation. While he lives by hope and perseverance amidst multiple oppressions, the reciter says in a pathetic turn, the situation is growing more difficult and leaves him with multiple questions (lines 8 and 9). Section five laments that the reciter has been deserted and forgotten by his own people, and this has damaged his body, his head, feet, hair, and internal organs. The reciter ends by saying that he is locked up in prison and tormented by prison guards, flies, heavy chains, and prolonged court trials that deny justice. While the *geerarsa* is not a continuation of Sandaba's speech *per se*, we can still find dialogic echoes between the two texts on two points. First, both the *geerarsa* and Sandaba specifically mention the 100-year-long Oromo oppression under the *neftenya* administration. The other is the Oromo political question, which Sandaba, the narrator and the Oromo audience are unsure as to when it will be answered.

Sandaba's speech, the songs, and the *geerarsa* turn the cultural ceremony into a political protest, provoking the Derg government to crack down on the organizers and participants. After the ceremony, the political scenario in Wallaga turns scary, indeed life-threatening for members of the EOPRS. Sandaba, his friends, colleagues and the members of his party who were involved in arranging the ceremony are all targeted. Some of them are arrested and subjected to torture, others are summarily murdered. Sandaba manages to escape to Sudan and join his friends in the OLF, who are already conducting an armed struggle against the Derg in the western parts of Ethiopia. However, rather than focusing on his travails, the novel presents the Derg dictatorship by storying the harassments of Sandaba's parents and family.

After Sandaba escapes, the novel focuses on how the Derg administration turns against his family, and this eventually leads us to how the political solidarity between the Oromo and Eritrean liberation fighters come about. Fiqir and her twin children are forced to run away from Naqamte as the Derg officials threaten to confiscate her properties and arrest her after Sandaba's escape. After suffering various harassments, sometimes for being a member of aristocratic family, and at other times for being a wife of a liberation fighter, Fiqr joins her mother-in-law Sintolinna in Harar. While she is there, one unlucky day the Derg government conscripts her teenage, underage sons and sends them to the war front in Tigray region. After their unit is defeated at the hand of the TPLF, they escape to Sudan, where they meet an Eritrean woman, Saba, who works for a humanitarian organization.

Saba emerges as a key character towards the end, though she had studied at Haile Selassie I University before the Civil War, and back in Chapter 5, we learnt that she worked with Sandaba in the land reform policy implementation. Now, when she sees the two teenagers, she suspects they may be Sandaba's relatives as they look very similar to Sandaba. She used to love Sandaba and decides to help his children, though she does not know his whereabouts. She returns to Khartoum with the boys, and one day she discovers Sandaba through an Oromo friend, another exile in Khartoum. Alkitil and Alkuma are joined with their father, and Sandaba and Saba also start living together and resume the short-lived relationship they began in their university days. The relationship between Sandaba and Saba has political implications. Both of them are the liberation fighters, the narrator tells us—Sandaba is a member of the OLF, and Saba is a secret member of the EPLF, though as a humanitarian worker she is not supposed to be a member of a political party. As we have seen, both the OLF and EPLF are proponents of the 'colonial thesis', which considers the Ethiopian empire as a colonial state. When Saba and Sandaba give birth to a daughter, and the baby born from an Eritrean mother and an Oromo father symbolizes this political relationship. The baby's

name (or names)—Walabuma for Sandaba and Netsanet for Saba—means freedom in Oromo and in Amharic. After the Derg regime collapses, Saba and Sandaba return to Addis Ababa following a call from the EPRDF. Thereafter, Saba leaves for Asmara to participate in the historic referendum through which Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993. She takes Netsanet/ Walabuma with her and they remain there.

The birth of Walabuma to two liberation fighters from different ethnic backgrounds who live in different regions in the former Ethiopia (Eritrea and Oromia), the time of her birth (shortly before the fall of the Derg), and her relocation to Asmara with her mother all carry broader political implications. The meaning of her name, freedom, signifies the birth of ethnic freedom achieved by the Ethiopian people, mainly the Oromo and the Eritreans, after the collapse of the repressive dictatorial regime in 1991. Walabuma's birth is a dialogic rejoinder to the death of Sandaba's great grandfather, Walabuma, who was killed at the battle of Calanqo during the Menelik's war of occupation. A century after their defeat, freedom is born after the collapse of the Derg government and the opportunity for the Oromo at least to have an independent regional state. Yet the OLF's political vision wanes away after the TPLF's unexpected crackdown of the OLF's force, which is finally forced to leave the country. Walabuma's flight to Asmara with her mother symbolizes the birth of the state of Eritrea and the waning of the vision of the formation of the state of Oromia following the OLF's (Sandaba's party). Sandaba's trajectory follows the birth and development of modern Oromo nationalism, which was promoted by the OLF and came to end in 1991.

Conclusion

Yoomi Laataa? is the first Oromo novel to contest Ethiopian political history through both its content and form and to present an Oromo view of the national history. From a content point of view, like *Yeburqa Zimita* the novel draws on the history of wars—the Ethiopian Civil War and Menelik's war of expansion. It focuses on historical events

connected to the wars, but from the perspective of the war victims, a perspective mostly ignored by mainstream Ethiopian historians. The main reason why the novel draws on war histories, I would argue, is that it was through these wars—particularly the war of imperial expansion in the 19th century—that different ethnic groups came into contact with one another, and those encounters determined their subsequent relationships. Whereas *Yeburqa Zimita* presented a single incident in a specific locality, Burqa, across different historical times, *Yoomi Laataa?* presents multiple historical events within multiple locales over a much wider historical period. This is where the two novels differ in their engagement with history. Whereas *Yeburqa Zimita* inserts an Oromo perspective within Ethiopian history, *Yoomi Laataa?* develops the possibility of an Oromo history.

This chapter has made two major points about how Ethiopian political history is represented in *Yoomi Laataa?* First, the novel shifts the vantage point from which history is narrated – as in the first three chapters of the novel, where Ethiopian national history before 1974 Revolution is narrated mostly by the extradiegetic narrator. Second, the novel reconstructs Oromo history both before and after the revolution. As I have argued, *Yoomi Laataa?* focuses on the 'silent aspects or silences' of Ethiopian national history. It does so by celebrating neglected Oromo historical figures, it reconstructs the history of the Oromo nationalism in the silenced period and narrates the Oromo indigenous way of life before the Amhara occupation. The novel focuses on the personal history and memories of members of the Oromo family of Yadanno Jarra and Wariyo. In order to recover the history of a people who, under the Amhara oppressive administration and its assimilationist policies, were prevented from creating their own archive to document their history, it musters and integrates both oral and written evidence in a balanced approach.

'Reading together' the two novels help us recognize echoes, if not dialogue, between them. Like *Yeburqa Zimita*, *Yoomi Laataa?* makes careful use of narrative strategies that

help foreground the perspectives of marginalized groups. The novel mounts its critique of Ethiopian national history and brings forward its alternative perspective through a careful choice of themes and spatial imagination, a complex character system, dialogism and direct speech representation. Spatial imagination introduces agency for marginalized voices. In order to further resist the omniscient frame of narration of the Great Tradition, the novel employs multiple focalizors and narrators, through which the voices of different groups within the marginalized peoples are foregrounded, and this is further enhanced by the direct representation of the speeches of the characters representing these voices. Internal dialogism and dialogized heteroglossia (in songs and political speeches) foreground competing views about specific historical incidents or themes and balance competing narratives, saving the novel from being a monological 'mouthpiece' of a single narrative.

What does 'reading together' *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* reveal about the use and importance of historical novels for critiques of mainstream Ethiopian nationalism and the Great Tradition? Reading together in the first two chapters of this thesis has highlighted how an Amharic author of Eritrean background came to embrace the perspective of another marginalized people, and how this perspective has proved more controversial when put forward in an Amharic novel than in one written in Afan Oromo. Contextual narratology, that is, attention to the context informing a narrative, has shown the main inspiration for Tesfaye, the author of *Yeburqa Zimita*, was political alliance and solidarity. As Tesfaye himself has commented, the main reasons why he embraced this perspective are the common history of oppression and similar attacks by the Amhara-led Ethiopian administration on Eritreans and Oromo, and the desire to narrativize a political vision developed by oppressed groups. In all the three major plotlines of the novel, the Amhara characters are reduced to minor positions but remain powerful. Whereas *Yeburqa Zimita* intervenes critically in a tradition of Amharic

historical novels, *Yoomi Laataa?* represents the first attempt at using the genre of the historical novel to crystallize historical consciousness embodied in a cluster of relatable characters and to use the form of the dialogic novel to voice political discourses, hopes, fears, and disappointments.

Though both novels draw on war histories, there is quite a difference between them, enhanced by their different spatial imagination. For example, in relation to the civil war during the Derg regime, *Yeburqa Zimita* shows only Eritreans and Tigrayans as its victims. The Oromo in Burqa have no idea about the war in the north of the country, and the novel is silent on the impact of the Derg dictatorship on the central, western, and eastern parts of the country as well as in regional towns and the capital. In this respect, the novel reproduces the tradition of Amharic war novels that consider the war as between Ethiopia and Eritreans and Tigrayans, glossing over Oromo concerns and their marginalization due to their ethnic identity. *Yoomi Laataa?* takes a different stance in this regard and clearly shows that the civil war impacted the Oromo just as much the Tigrayans and Eritreans. The Derg dictatorship does not only batter the cities in the north such as Asmara and Mekelle, but equally Naqamte, Addis Ababa, and Harar. To give an example, in *Yeburqa Zimita* Addis Ababa is presented as peaceful place that peacefully surrendered at the end of the war. In *Yoomi Laataa?,* it is a horrific place torn by the confrontation between the Derg and oppositional forces, including pro-Amhara groups. People are killed due to their identity in Addis just as in Asmara.

The second point that reading together these two historical novels written in different Ethiopian languages reveals is that, though written in different languages and literary contexts, the novels use similar narrative techniques, select similar historical themes, and both use dialogism, though to different ends mainly due to the positionality of the authors and of the novels within their different linguistic and literary traditions. In terms of character system, *Yeburqa Zimita* traces a lineage of Oromo resistance through

three militant Oromo characters, Waqo and his two children, Anole and Hawani, who are educated and live most of their lives in the urban areas. After their birth, they have no first-hand, practical experience of Oromo ways of life and most of their views are drawn from what they hear from elders or read at schools, which is very limited. In *Yeburqa Zimita*, then, Oromo world views and traditions are mostly mediated through past stories and presented by characters who have never practised or lived the everyday life of the Oromo people. In their different ways and careers, Anole and Hawani articulate key concerns and trajectories of Oromo nationalism. Anole symbolizes the OLF political history specifically during the transitional period, whereas Hawani symbolizes the OPDO, the political organization created by the TPLF to extend their structure among the Oromo, but eventually she gives up as she is disillusioned by the TPLF politics. The difference between the two is the difference between the political theses that form the counter-hegemonic narratives—the OLF upheld the colonial thesis whereas the TPLF along with its allies like the OPDO advocate for the national oppression thesis. The two protagonists symbolize the Oromo political groups, who are unable to achieve their political vision due to the conspiracy committed on them by the TPLF.

By contrast, though *Yoomi Laataa?* features educated and strong Oromo characters like *Yeburqa Zimita*, its protagonists are deeply familiar with Oromo lived conditions and have lived in Oromo communities under different regimes. Unlike *Yeburqa Zimita,* they have experiences of travelling to different regions of the Oromo land, and report what they have personally witnessed whether it is cultural or political oppression. Wariyo is the key figure in this regard, a holder of cultural knowledge and memories who has travelled widely but still remembers his Borana culture. *Yoomi Laataa?* also shows a more gradual trajectory of resistance to the Amhara domination, first through Oromo characters (Wariyo and Sintolinna) who live 'undercover' in the Amhara world, particularly during Haile Selassie's regime. *Yoomi Laataa?* goes from undercover Oromo

characters in a basically Amhara world to a more vocal and organized resistance, political action, and alliance. This indicates that *Yoomi Laataa?* is more rooted in Oromo culture and shows a trajectory of gradual mobilization, whereas *Yeburqa Zimita* is about uncovering past histories/memories and immediate mobilization. When the novel comes to the Derg regime, Oromo resistance becomes much more explicit, vocal, and organized in the form of cultural groups and political organizations, represented through Sandaba and Eliyas, the two outspoken Oromo protagonists of the second part of the novel.

Contrastingly, *Yeburqa Zimita* uses multiple intradiegetic narrators and shifting focalization in order to create narrative space for marginalized voices so that foregrounds narrative resistance. Oromo oral history is presented through the stories of an old man (Waqo) but focalized through the memory of young and educated Anole, who mostly holds different historical views from the extradiegetic narrator. Instead, *Yoomi Laataa?* uses the two narrative strategies of multiple intradiegetic narrators and shifting focalization to mostly show Amhara hegemony reflected through the toxic views of the Amhara minor characters. This indicates the novels' commitment to the representation of multiple voices and themes not only through their content, but also through their form.

In a similar fashion, dialogism, including internal dialogism, is utilized differently in the two novels. In *Yeburqa Zimita,* dialogized elements appear in the form of letters, diaries, folksongs, and reports, and are used to give voice and make space for the history of the marginalized people excluded from the Ethiopian history with which Amharic readers are familiar. Dialogism is also important in connecting the fictional historical narratives to the real historical and political contexts as most of the dialogized elements are non-fictional or realistic to historical reality.

Finally, the novels use similar strategies in order to expose the brutality of the Derg regime and its internal weaknesses, and to show the determination of the liberation

forces. For example, the similar incidents are presented by the novels to achieve this objective. In *Yeburqa Zimita*, in a confrontation between the TPLF and the Derg, the TPLF soldiers use wrong tactics and are annihilated by Derg soldiers positioned high up on a hill; yet the stress is on the number of valiant soldiers martyred on the TPLF's side and the determination and heroism of the soldiers and their leader, Hayelom, regardless of the brutality and loss. A similar incident in the same region narrated by *Yoomi Laataa?*, which however stresses how Derg strategy is wrong from the very beginning, negatively impacting its effectiveness and hastening its downfall (*YL* 228). This time, it is the Derg soldiers who follow wrong tactics and are annihilated by TPLF soldiers stationed on top of a hill. Yet the focus is on the two underage and unwilling Oromo fighters, Alkuma and Alkitil, who have been forcibly recruited in the areas controlled by the TPLF and eventually escape.

Interethnic alliance is important in both novels, though it is also questioned. In *Yeburqa Zimita*, Anole and Samuel (an Eritrean) come to know each other while they are studying abroad, and later their friendship develops into an alliance, though not through Anole's free will. Rather, the Eritreans coax him into working for them, though later on they rescue him. In *Yoomi Laataa?* Saba and Sandaba also meet as students, and that early easy friendship becomes political due to the repressive war that brings Oromo and Eritreans together abroad. In this regard, one possible point on which the novels diverge is who the Oromo interact and ally themselves with. *Yeburqa Zimita* shows an alliance between the Tigray and the Oromo, exemplified by Hawani and Hayelom, whereas *Yoomi Laataa?* show no such a thing. Rather it shows the relationship and intermarriage between Amhara and Oromo, as in the case of Sandaba and Fiqir. By contrast, *Yeburqa Zimita* features no close relationship between Oromo and Amhara characters, and even between Anole and Yodit the idea of marriage is dropped due to the historical hostility between the two groups. *Yoomi Laataa?* features no concerted revenge on the Amhara by Oromo characters, only individual self-defence, as in the

case of Yadanno and Sandaba with the Amhara landlords. It rather focuses on showing how the dominance of the Amhara in the everyday life of the Oromo. In conclusion, reading together approach reveals how the contexts in which the novels are positioned shape their content and form in their representation of the Ethiopian political history.

The previous two chapters present the Ethiopian political history and the narratives that underwrite it. This is one core issue in the Ethiopian studies. In the subsequent two chapters, I focus on two main concerns of the Great Tradition and the reaction from the proponents of the counter-hegemonic narratives. In chapter 3, I present language ideology in the form of multilingualism and monolingualism, and in Chapter 4, I focus on the relationship between different forms of imaginative expressions—orature and literature/ the novel. Unlike the previous chapters, the remaining chapters present all four novels together though still the structure of each chapter is different.

Chapter 3
Literary multilingualism in historical and village novels

Inxooxxoo dhaabbatanii	No more standing on *Enxooxxo*,
Cafee gadi ilaaluun hafe	to look down at the pasture below,
Finfinne loon geessanii	no more taking cattle to *Finfinne*,
Hora obaa suun hafe	to drink at the mineral spring
Tullou Daalattii irratti	No more gathering on *Tullu Daalattii*,
Yaa' iin Gullalle hafe	where the *Gullalle* assembly used to meet
Gafrassatti dabranii	No more going beyond *Gafarsa*,
Koraan cabsuunis hafe	to collect firewood
Hurufa boombii irratti	No more taking calves,
Jabbille yaasuun hafe	to the meadow at *Hurufa Boombii*.
Bara jarri dhufani	The year the enemy came,
Loon keenyas ni dhmani	our cattle perished.
Iddo Mashashaan dhufe	Since Meshesha came,
Birmadummaanis hafe (*YZ* 273).	Freedom vanished.
	(tr. Assefa 2015:60)

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, this song is presented in the Latin script in Chapter 9 of *Yeburqa Zimita*. It is a form of heteroglossia, and the most powerful example of literary multilingualism in this novel, which carries thematic (see Ch. 1) and literary or aesthetic functions (see Ch. 4). As I also mentioned in Chapter 1, the narrator tells us that Hawani is not actually singing the song but only recalls it as a historical memory. From a linguistic perspective, two things are striking about the presence of this song in the novel at this particular moment in the narrative. First, from the viewpoint of the general narrative context, the song dialogically forecasts the multilingual policy that Hawani's party, the EPRDF, is going to introduce, as later highlighted in her presentation. As the dialogue between Hawani and Hayelom indicates, at the Naqamte conference discussions take place in Afan Oromo (*YZ* 272) and presenting the song in Afan Oromo narratively gestures towards this significant linguistic practice. Second, the song is written in the Latin script, an unusual practice in the Amharic literary tradition,

also given that in reality neither the Derg government nor the EPRDF used the Latin script to write any Ethiopian language.

The Latin script was in fact used to write Afan Oromo since the 1970s by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and finally approved by the EPRDF under pressure from the OLF (Degineh 2015; Feyisa 1995, 1996; Mekuria 1994, 1997). From this perspective, the use of the Latin script in this passage flashforwards to the later adoption of the script, and not only the multilingual policy. This use of the Latin script has remarkable political implications. It reverberates with the script politics not only of the Derg era, but also during the novel's publication. One of the major aspects of the Amharic monolingualism is script homogenization, promoted by the Haile Selassie and Derg governments. While the Derg regime, at least at the policy level, allowed about 15 languages to be used in the national media, it dictated that all should be written the Sabean script (Bender 1985; Bender et al. 1972; McNab 1990). Against this background, the use of the Latin script in this section of the novel can be interpreted as a form of dialogic textual resistance against the Derg script homogenization policy. The fact that the song is not articulated but just recreated in Hawani's mind can be interpreted as narrative representation of the future policy, but textually the use of this script signals the novel's recognition of multilingual reality as well as of resistance to monolingual and monoscriptual Amharic literary practices.

I present this case here to highlight the main concern of this chapter, which are the linguistic dimensions of my corpus of novels. In Bakhtin's conception of the novel, the presence of other languages in the novel, like the above example, is designated as 'linguistic heteroglossia'.[150] In this chapter, I analyse the polyphony of the novels in my corpus as reflecting a deep engagement with language ideologies, language policies,

[150] See Bakhtin *et al.* (1994) for further discussion on the heteroglossia in the novel.

and language identity politics in Ethiopia. In the next section, I provide an overview of the theoretical issues related to the study of multilingualism in the novel, before I analyse the four selected novels—the two historical novels present political aspects and politically oriented multilingualism, whereas the two village novels present multilingualism in everyday life without reflecting political undertones.

3.1 Language politics and literary multilingualism

Since the war of expansion in the second half of the 19th century, interactions among the different peoples in Ethiopia have increased, most prominently in the last decades of the 20th century—as *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* themselves show. Translocal and transregional trades, education, forced migration, urbanization, occupation, and so on have increased the possibility of higher multilingualism in Ethiopia: people usually cross linguistic boundaries out of their free will and learn languages other than their mother tongues, but others have been forced to learn Amharic. While this is a reality on the ground, Ethiopia attempted to forge out a homogenous nation with one language, one religion, and uniform culture.[151]

This cultural and linguistic diversity was officially recognized in 1991 with the introduction of ethnolinguistic federalism, but this has not been without contestation or resistance. As I have showed in the introduction, linguistic policies have been major concerns of the Great Tradition and the counter-hegemonic narratives. Amharic monolingualism is one of the pillars of the Great Tradition narrative, and its proponents have used Amharic as an instrument for assimilating the dominated people under the Amhara cultural and political hegemony. Language rights and multilingualism have instead been key to counter-hegemonic narratives. For the proponents of the counter-hegemonic narratives and of the Great Tradition, language is as important as history

[151] Haile Selassie's decree of 1941 can be an example of this attempt (Mekuria 1994).

(Williams 2017). As we shall see in this chapter, language ideologies are a major concern of both historical and village novels. Like their authors, the majority of the characters in each novel are multilingual. In these novels, 'languages are not simply communicative tools; they also have symbolic and cultural value and are related to identity and group membership' (Cenoz 2004:624).

The novels respond to language politics and the socio-political aspects of the multilingualism from their different positions as they are situated in different literary and linguistic traditions. For example, given the tense political relationship between Amharic and Afan Oromo, the presence of Amharic in an Oromo novel and of Afan Oromo in Amharic novel will carry more political implications than the presence of Gumuz language in an Oromo novel like *Gurraacha Abbayaa*. As contextual narratology suggests, historical novels in particular are in dialogue with the socio-political events they narrate. Though the novels use similar narrative strategies to represent the speeches of the characters, each novel treats multilingualism and monolingualism differently.[152] As I will show, the historical novels present politicised multilingualism—one speaks a language other than one's mother tongue for political purposes that range from espionage to affiliation (*Yeburqa Zimita)*, whereas the village novels tend to present multilingual practices as occurring for social purposes and as a means of survival (*Evangadi)*.

Besides presenting, both narratively and textually, the multilingualism of the characters and narrator, *Yeburqa Zimita* thematizes language ideologies and politics in what Sturm-Trigonakis *et al.* call 'metamultilingualism'. This involves 'speaking about languages in the broadest sense ….[and] it has to be considered a part of the intention for polyglossia when the reader is being informed in which language a specific scene happens' (Sturm-

[152] Monika Fludernik (1993, 2012, 2018) argues that the novels use similar narrative techniques but differ in the themes and context they engage with.

Trigonakis et al., 2013:85). Metamultilingualism includes the debates, criticisms and comments about languages that the authors or characters or narrators make, promote or contest. Metamultilingualism provides evidence of strong concerns about language and can provide evidence of linguistic diversity in the context in which a novel is produced even when the text is basically monolingual (Rudin 1996).

My use of the concept of multilingualism in this study is slightly different from the way linguists define it—the novels are not strictly multilingual so that the reader does not need to know the languages mixed into the main language of the novel.[153] Following Sturm-Trigonakis *et al.* (2013), I use the expression 'literary multilingualism' to stress on literary mediation or fictional aspect of multilingualism. For Juliette Taylor-Batty (2013), literary multilingualism is 'a means of representing a polylingual reality, whether through the direct representation of characters' language(s), [… or] the representation of a linguistically diverse […] reality […] or in a distorted [language] that manifests the traces of its translational 'origins'' (p.6). Williams (2017:11-2) stresses the political aspects of literary multilingualism as not only (a) 'the existence of two or more languages within a dialogue, a text, or an author or character's mind;' but also (b) 'a political condition, wherein multiple languages figure within state policy, within colonial practice or in the meetings between nations or communities;' and to these he adds (c) the 'multilingual incidences of discontinuity or contradiction within the 'same' languages: meetings of dialect and register, incidences of unusual vocabulary or accent' (Ibid). In *Yoomi Laataa?*, for example, Wariyo and Getaw argue over the status of the Oromo dialects in Hararge and Borana Oromo groups. For the Amhara aristocrat Getaw, Oromo dialects are different languages with a hierarchy of prestige, whereas for Wariyo they are all the same and equal regardless of regional variations. The difference in their

[153] For further discussion on linguistic definitions of multilingualism and how it is different from the way I used in this study (but still important in developing my idea), see Alastair and Sinfree (2007) Bhatia and Ritchie (2012), Cenoz (2013), Clyne (2011), Foster (1970) and Larissa and Singleton (2012).

language ideologies echoes the difference between the language politics of the Great Tradition and that of counter-hegemonic narratives.

In short, literary multilingualism in this study refers to the presence and/or reference to a language—whether foreign or indigenous—other than the language in which a novel is written. I deliberately included the term 'indigenous' in this definition. Most studies of multilingualism (including literary multilingualism) have focused on the presence and influence of foreign, typically colonial, languages in literary texts; less attention has been given to the mutual influence between indigenous languages, and even less on the influence of politically marginalized languages on texts in politically dominant indigenous languages. As Sturm-Trigonakis *et al*. (2013: 74) put it:

> while colingualism at a regional level—as for example in the Alsace or Switzerland – has a rather peaceful character and mixtilingual texts do not necessarily take sides in favour of or against one side or the other, in other parts of the world in the course of migration, decolonization, and changing political conditions a potential for language conflict develops and this leaves its mark directly on mixtilingual and multilingual texts. Thus, in the postcolonial context almost every word in Wolof, Berberic, or Urdu can be read as a political statement against the respective former colonial power France or Great Britain.[154]

Given Ethiopian language politics, particularly as mediated through historical novels regardless the languages in which they are written, I argue that literary multilingualism can be seen as a token of resistance, since it opposes monolingualism and the narratives of domination, which are the main forms of marginalization. This can take two forms. First, novels may include language among what Laachir and Talajooy (2012) call 'choice

[154] Taylor-Batty (2013), who has studied the representation of multilingualism in modernist English fiction, also argue that 'multilingual techniques are, whether implicitly or explicitly, ideologically motivated (p.42)', though she still has reservations when she adds that, 'the correlation between linguistic mixing and a rejection of essentialist conceptions of national language is not always clear-cut' (p.43). Maria Boletsi (2014) adds that '[t]he visibility of multilingual practice today increases their potential to contest the monolingual paradigm' (p.151). In the same vein, Sturm-Trigonakis *et al.*, (2013: 105) rightly state that, 'Comparable to their present position as counter discourse to established literary discourse types, multilingual texts have always played a subversive role in the literary system, be it as burlesque from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century or be it as surrealist or Dadaist experiments in the twentieth century.'

of topics', with characters and narrators questioning and contesting the monolingual paradigm so as to challenge Amharic domination (this is almost the same with Rudin's (1996) 'metamultilingualism').[155] Second, novels in the dominant language may directly incorporate words from the oppressed languages, using different forms of translation, or mix the scripts to challenge monolingual textual standards. For example, original toponyms, as noted in *Yeburqa Zimita*, are used in opposition to the history of renaming them in Amharic as one form of assimilation.

Beyond resistance, literary multilingualism can also be a reflection of cultural coexistence or cultural diversity. According to Torres (2007), who has studied the presence of Spanish in Latino English novels, 'code switching [as one form of multilingual expression] is not only metaphorical but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages; literary language actualize the discourse of the border and bilingual/ bicultural communities' (p.77). In the Ethiopian context, the historical relationship between the languages that meet in the text plays a great role in this respect and complicates the matter more. As we have seen in previous sections, the Amhara and the Oromo have an antagonistic relationship, and their literatures demonstrate the unequal power relationship between the two. In the Oromo novel *Yoomi Laataa?*, for example, almost all the Amhara characters are addressed through their traditional social and military titles such as *Ras, Fitawrari, Qenyazmach,* and *Baramberas*.[156] These are untranslatable Amharic words and

---

[155] Multilingual texts 'undermined the imperialist ideologies of the European nation-states—but contemporary hybrid language constructs transport all that and more. That they question everything national and homogeneous through the mere fact of their linguistic heterogeneity places them at the forefront of current literary production' (Sturm-Trigonakis *et al*., 2013:107).

[156] These are traditional Amhara feudal military titles. According to Teferi (2015:7) 'the case with Ras Getaw and Yaadannoo Walabummaa in Yoomi Laataa, whose names symbolize the unequal relationship between the Amhara landlords and their Oromo gabars (serfs). The politicomilitary and aristocratic title 'Ras' thoroughly encapsulates the privileged social status of the Amhara landowning class, which

multilingual traces in their own. Along with the proper Amhara names, these titles show the historical presence of Amhara settlers among the Oromo communities like the Hararge region in *Yoomi Laataa?* The titles also indicate the higher social status of the Amhara characters compared to the Oromo characters, gesturing to the unequal relationship between them. One of the uses of multilingual traces in the Amharic and Afan Oromo historical and village novels analysed in this chapter is to indicate cultural diversity.

In some cases, multilingualism can be understood as realistic representation of linguistic diversity.[157] The novels present the life histories of characters like Hawani and Anole (*Yeburqa Zimita*); Wariyo, Getaw and Sandaba (*Yoomi Laataa?*), Karlet (*Evangadi*), who travel translocally, transregionally, and even internationally and cross different linguistic and cultural borders. The novels respond to such spatial and temporal diversity, contributing to the presence of multiple trajectories, stories and experiences. As the spatial scope they present is very wide and the multilingual practices they present are so diverse, the novels do not present Ethiopia as a single multilingual local with similar multilingual practices; rather they present different multilingual locals where multilingualism operates differently though there are some overlapping. My contextual and multilingual approach understands multilingualism within its local specific contexts. There are five important multilingual locals in *Yoomi Laataa?* that I believe serve my purpose in this chapter, namely the Hararge region in eastern Ethiopia, Addis Ababa and Ambo in central Ethiopia, Naqamte in western Ethiopia, and Khartoum in Sudan. In a similar fashion, *Yeburqa Zimita* presents multilingual locals,

---

dominated Oromo serfs while controlling the military, judiciary, and political power. Yaadannoo Walabummaa, meaning 'remembrance of freedom', alludes to the past before the beginning of Abyssinian exploitation.'

[157] According to Taylor-Batty (2013) 'themes of exile, travel and intercultural encounter lead, inevitably, to the necessity of representing different languages' (p.39). Likewise, in her study of Chike Enigwe's novels, Elizabeth Bekers (2014) states that 'the novel's multilingualism on the whole gives a realistic impression of the characters' linguistic backgrounds and environments' (p.121).

including Burqa and the Adama Ras Hotel in central Ethiopia, Naqamte in Wallaga, the Sahel region in Tigray, and Asmara in Eritrea.

Lastly, multilingualism reflects several thematic functions, such as cultural and historical authenticity, social affiliation, and means of survival. For example, the historical songs in *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Yeburqa Zimita* reflect cultural and historical authenticity; metamultilingual discussion of minority ethnic groups, mainly the Kuyegu, in *Evangadi* indicates how learning the language of stronger ethnic groups affords protection from one's contenders and creates affiliation. In this case, multilingualism is associated with powerlessness, as we shall see.

As in the rest of the thesis, my approach in this chapter is that of a comparative 'reading together' (Laachir 2016) of the novels, placing them in relation with one another from a perspective that acknowledges that they stem from 'multilingual locals', i.e. from contexts that are multilingual, and the novels acknowledge the multilingual reality (Orsini, 2015; Laachir, Marzagora, & Orsini, 2018a, 2018b). As a method of reading multilingualism in the selected novels, I draw on Sternberg's (1981:223-32) 'translational mimesis', which includes 'selective reproduction, verbal transposition, conceptual reflection and explicit attribution'. Each novel does not equally draw on all these strategies. As we shall see, for example, the historical novels use more 'selective reproduction' than the village novels to evoke historical authenticity.

The chapter 'reads together' the two Amharic and Oromo historical novels discussed in the previous chapters (*Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*) and two village novels (*Evangadi* in Amharic and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* in Afan Oromo). As we shall see, genre offers a useful comparative lens: to different degrees, the historical novels employ multilingualism as part of their revisionist critique of the Great Tradition, as discussed in the previous chapters: the unequal and oppressive Amhara-centric language policy is thereby both historicized and politicized. While *Yoomi Laataa?* traces this oppressive

and discriminatory language policy back to Emperor Menelik's expansionism and posits historical continuity, *Yeburqa Zimita* 'blames' Amharic monolingualism on Haile Selassie and Mengistu Hailemariam. The language policy is explicitly discussed by the characters in the novels, with Eritrean character from the opposition party during the Derg regime supporting Oromo claims in *Yoomi Laataa?* In the novel multilingualism is presented more as part of the existing variety of languages in Ethiopia and as an important factor for identity formation (e.g., Sandaba). Both historical novels challenge the linguistic and literary domination of any language, and of Amharic and Afan Oromo in particular, by violating both their linguistic and literary standards and protocols such as the use of single script and deliberately indicate the presence of other languages by incorporating words and expressions from the languages other than the novels composed in. The difference is the position from which they approach this multilingualism, as shown later in this chapter.

In the village novels, by contrast, state language policies are not thematized *per se*. Rather, multilingualism is presented as the reality of different regions of Ethiopia: people just *are* multilingual. But the novels also present multilingual competence as a necessary (and beneficial) factor in peaceful coexistence. In Fiqremarqos' *Evangadi*, set in south-west Ethiopia, rather than Amharic nationalism it is the influence of colonialism that is blamed for the lack of self-pride in one's own group's language and culture. The novel centres on a British ethnographer who undertakes research among the Hamar community, and traces of these communities' languages are offered as a realistic or true to life representation. The novel also presents a foreign traveller, an Ethio-Spanish girl, who comes to the Kuyegu land in Ethiopia in order to search for relatives of her late grandfather. For the researcher, learning the local languages is a professional necessity, but the novel also shows that learning other languages is necessary for the communities' own survival themselves, particularly in the case of

smaller groups. Amharic is necessary for social mobility for characters who move away to the capital, to study and work (e.g., for Sora Galcha who studies in Addis Ababa), but locally other languages such as Hamar, Kuyegu and others are presented as being more important. *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, which is set in western Ethiopia, is unusual among Oromo novels in focusing on another community, the Gumuz. Unlike *Yoomi Laataa?*, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* does not explicitly discuss language as a factor of oppression, or of resistance and mobilization: rather, even Amhara characters readily learn local languages. Reading together *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*—despite their differences (*Evangadi* is more explicitly 'ethnographic')—shows that language in rural areas is a less politicized and contested issue. People are more open to learning languages, and multilingualism pertains to practice rather than identity mobilization. In this respect, Friederike Lüpke's (2016) notion of 'small-scale multilingualism', which highlights forms of multilingualism practised outside the influence of the official languages, is pertinent.

In short, in this chapter, I explore how debates, dialogues, idiolects, etc. make language part of these novels, and what their strategies and motivations are. Specifically, the chapter addresses the following questions: How do the historical novels in Amharic and Afan Oromo represent language ideology and the effects of official monolingual policies? Is literary monologism always repressive? And is multilingual representation only a recognition of the reality of multilingual locals in Ethiopia, or is it a critique of official monolingualism? Are representations of multilingual realities always to be interpreted as ideological or political statements, as a kind of literary resistance against linguistic homogenization? How do the novels mediate between monolingual narrative and multilingual discourse? And what contribution do these novels make to the study of multilingualism in literature more broadly?

3.2 Politicized multilingualism: Linguistic diversity in *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*

Both historical novels, though from different traditions, have language ideology and politics as an important theme. Their spatial imagination, which resists the national imagination that presents space in generic terms like country and region without internal stratification, opens up the novel for the multiple aspects of multilingual practices, cognizant of the internal divisions along linguistic or ethnic lines that the characters and the narrators inhabit. By foregrounding different multilingual locals, *Yeburqa Zimita,* permeates the old significant geographies of Amharic novels with new linguistic realities, and introduces new linguistically significant geographies.

A spatial imagination is able to show multilingual practices through characters and narrators. Apart from the extradiegetic narrators, who introduce language forms depending on the contexts they present, both *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* feature multilingual protagonists—Anole and Hawani in *Yeburqa Zimita* and Wariyo, Getaw, Sandaba and Eliyas in *Yoomi Laataa?* These characters travel across different regions in Ethiopia and abroad, either for educational, political reasons or their careers, and in the process, they become multilingual and employ their multilingual skills. The characters' linguistic make up is consciously commented on in both novels, and on several occasions the narrator directly tells us that a character is speaking in a certain language or using a translator, as when, in *Yeburqa Zimita*, we are told that Anole speaks in Afan Oromo with the three Oromo elders who come to meet him in Addis Ababa and tell him that the people in Burqa are waiting for him to lead them to war (*YZ* 52). Hawani and Anole travel throughout central and northern regions of Ethiopia, where they cross linguistic boundaries that force them to learn other languages.

Thematically speaking, most Oromo novels focus only on Afan Oromo and the challenges it has gone through to achieve an official recognition. *Yoomi Laataa?* is the

only historical novel in Afan Oromo to discuss language politics within the larger Ethiopian historical context. Its language ideology is not confined to the Oromo language, either; rather the novel discusses language policy across different past regimes, the drawbacks of the implementation of the official monolingual policy, and the politics underpinning multilingualism and monolingualism during the Haile Selassie and Derg governments. Reading the two novels together from the point of view of language shows how they both represent the challenges that monolingual speakers face in multilingual contexts, and use code-switching, bi-script and in-textual translation in order to represent multilingual speech and foreground the multilingual practices in Ethiopia within their historical contexts.[158] However, due to their different positionality within the Amharic and Afan Oromo literary traditions, the implications and meanings evoked by each technique are different in each novel. In *Yoomi Laataa?*, multilingualism reflects the domination of Amharic and the presence of linguistic and cultural diversity, while in the case of *Yeburqa Zimita*, multilingualism is a form of resistance and a political statement against the narratives of the Great Tradition.

[158] Code-switching (Gardner-Chloros and Weston 2015; Montes-Alcalá 2015; Torres 2007), bi-script (Bachner 2016; Damrosch 2007; Tawada 2014) and different forms of translation (Bachner 2016; McIntire 2005; Sternberg 1981; Tawada 2014) are major ways through which the novels represent multilingual reality though there are several other narrative techniques that we see in this chapter.

3.2.1 The 'devil's tongue' in the sacred language: Non-national Ethiopian languages in *Yeburqa Zimita*[159]

> 'Seventy years ago, the farmers in its surrounding used to call it '***bishaan seexan***— the Devil's water'. However, **Waqo**, who is also called ***'Abbaa Duulaa'*** after his military title, renamed it '***Burqaa***'. *Burqaa* means 'spring' in **Orominya**' (emphasis mine).[160]

Amharic monolingualism has been a cause for the marginalization of non-national Ethiopian languages, and specifically Oromo language(Alemseged 2013; Araia 2012; Jeylan 2008; Mekuria 1994; Milkessa 2015). Afan Oromo and its Latin script were considered alien and was denounced as the 'devil's tongue' or 'devil's script' by Amhara Orthodox priests (Zitelman 1996:290) quoted in Mohammed (2008:212). Up to 1991, the Sabean script was used as a yardstick to monitor linguistic homogenization regardless of its flaws in reproducing with non-Semitic languages, to the point that even modifications to the Sabean script to reproduce Afan Oromo sounds were banned (Mohammed 2008). When Gadissa Birru, the author of the first Oromo novel, *Kuusaa Gadoo*, was working with other Oromo lexicographers on the Oromo dictionary in the 1980s at Addis Ababa University and wanted to modify some Amharic alphabets in order to represent the Oromo sounds, the department, which was responsible to give them permission, rejected their request on the ground that such a practice would harm the nature of Amharic.[161] Such restrictions and prohibitions have negatively impacted the development of Oromo literature(Mohammed 2008a), as the language was unable to produce literary works without a proper writing system.

---

[159] Many words in different foreign languages appear in *Yeburqa Zimita*, but here I focus only on Ethiopian indigenous language, mainly Afan Oromo, due to the key relationship between the two, and the political and narrative significance of Oromo, in the novel.

[160] 'ከሰባ አመት በፊት የአከባቢው ገበረዎች 'ብሻን ሴጣን _የሰይጣን ዉሃ ' እያሉ ይጠሩት ነበር። በጦር አዛዥ ማእረግ 'አባ ዱላ' ተብለው የሚታወቁት ዋቆ ግን 'ቡርቃ' ሲሉ ሰየሙት። ቡርቃ ማለት በኦሮሚኛ 'ምንጭ ማለት ነው።'(32)
[161] Interview with Gaddisa Birru (December 2018).

The epigraph above is one of the multilingual statements by the extradiegetic narrator in *Yeburqa Zimita*. It appears in Chapter 1 of the novel, when the narrator first introduces the story of Burqa's silence. Before telling the story, the narrator gives some background information about the word '*burqaa*' in the title and its language, using an Amharized term for the Oromo language (*Orominya* to mean Afan Oromo). All in all, five expressions in the quote are traces of the Oromo language. Among them, only '*bishaan seexan'* and '*burqaa*' are directly translated, while other three are left untranslated. Such lack of translation cannot be attributed to the absence of equivalent terms in Amharic, rather it shows the keenness of the narrator to signal the presence of Afan Oromo right from the start. This trace is both evidence of the narrator's multilingual skills and a gesture of recognition of the diverse linguistic identity of the people it presents. Multilingualism in *Yeburqa Zimita* is not presented only as a natural part of social reality but it is used at paratextual and textual levels for specific narrative, thematic and political purposes.

At the paratextual level, as we have seen, multilingualism in *Yeburqa Zimita* begins right with its title with the keyword *burqa*, which gestures towards the presence of the Oromo language in the novel.[162] Other chapter headings (5 out of 16) carry powerful traces of Afan Oromo and Tigrinya, with phrases that introduce larger themes.[163] These words and phrases are left without translation, or in some cases the translation is delayed to later in the chapters, creating suspense and arousing attention in the reader. For example, Chapter 14 is entitled as 'እንተለ ቶ ሀወኒ ኤሳ ጅርታ?' [My daughter Hawani,

---

[162] The Afan Oromo word in the title of the novel, *burqa*, is different from the meaning offered by the narratorial epigram. In the title, it is used as a proper noun, which does not in fact necessarily mean 'spring', which is the meaning of the common noun form of the word. It rather metaphorically stands for the silence that the Oromo people have succumbed to after their defeat by the Menelik's forces as explained by Anole Waqo.

[163] Chapters 6 (ማሪያም አስመራይት፣ ሲቪል፣ ኮምብሽታቶ፣159); 7 (ቼንቶ ፐር ቼንቶ! ጉዋል፣ ኤረ ሮዝና፣197); 8 (ኖራህ!, 227); 11 (የቡርቃ ቁጣ! ዝምተኛው ቡርቃ፣ 315); and 14 ('እንተለ ቶ ሀወኒ ኤሳ ጅርታ?407).

where are you?]', a sentence in Afan Oromo that is untranslated and gestures at the main point of the chapter. The question is part of a song, a *jalota* or war time Oromo song. We saw in Chapter 1 of the novel that names of three characters, Waqo, Anole and Hawani, are repeatedly mentioned in such songs because the people of Burqa have chosen them to lead their struggle against the Amhara administration. The title of Chapter 14 evokes one such a song, but it is more impactful due to its narrative significance. In this chapter we learnt that Hawani has been arrested in Addis Ababa, and the people in the Burqa village who sing this song do not know her whereabouts. By incorporating the words of the singers in their own language, the author makes their concern about Hawani most prominent. Accordingly, the presence of Afan Oromo is used here for emphatic purpose and to foreground the theme in the chapter. Moreover, according to contextual narratologists, such paratextual elements are attributed to the real author (Chatman 1990; Nünning 2004; Smith 1981), so that such traces imply textual evidence of the author's multilingual skills. In this regard, multilingualism plays an aesthetic role so that it is also a strategy that the author uses to distance himself from the narrative he presents.

At the intradiegetic level, multilingualism is concentrated in the selected multilingual locals (see 1.3). As already mentioned, my discussion of multilingual practices in different multilingual locals focuses on the dominant factors of the spatial imagination and character system. First of all, the names of the two protagonists, who both actively engage in multilingual practices and critique the monolingual policy, Anole Waqo and Hawani Waqo, are Afan Oromo words with broad symbolic meanings (see Ch. 1), and by their own they are multilingual traces in this Amharic novel.[164] From the

[164] As I discussed in Ch. 1, Anole is originally the name of historical place in the Arsi region where the Oromo fought against the Menelik's force. In his speech at the OSA in Washington DC in 2014, the author, Tesfaye Gebreab, explained that Anole represents two OLF prominent leaders Lenco Lata and Dima Nago (Tesfaye 2014).

perspective of contextual narratology , Anole's language ideology echoes the language policy of the OLF, which argues that the Oromo language should be given an independent place in the Ethiopian national linguistic space. However, Anole does not argue for the domination of Afan Oromo or the replacement of Amharic by the Oromo language, as real-world OLF officials did. Like Anole, Hawani is multilingual and in fact more critical of the Amharic monolingual policy, but Anole is silent on these important topics.

Let me present the scenes in which their views about language policies and language ideology are extensively reflected. Whereas early in the novel Anole is introduced—by the Derg minister discussing the conflict in Burqa in Chapter 1—as not ethnically minded and disinterested in politics, in the two multilingual locals in which Anole's multilingualism is highlighted are also those in which Afan Oromo is politicized. In other words, the multilingualism that Anole's case shows implies different political purposes: to spy, to indicate a group affiliation and to show dishonesty. Chapter 3 is one of the most multilingual chapters in the novel: traces of the Oromo language range from proper nouns like Waqo, *Abbaa Duulaa,* Abba Boru, Burqa, etc., to metalinguistic comments, to the insertion of a (mostly) untranslated song. Metalinguistic traces include Anole's conversation with the two Oromo elders, Abba Boru and Namara, which the narrator tells us is in Afan Oromo though it is presented in Amharic.[165] Such translational mimesis indicates linguistic authenticity while at the same time distancing the author from the politically sensitive topic and very Oromo-centred conversation.

For Anole, speaking Oromo is a way to expresses his affiliation and solidarity with his people. After he arrives in Burqa, Anole meets Gutema, an Arsi Oromo who the Derg government has sent to take military action if the conflict breaks out. Anole starts talking to Gutema in Afan Oromo, the narrator tells us, but Gutema replies, 'let us put

[165] Their conversation is discussed in Ch. 1 of this thesis as an Oromo critique of Amhara supremacy.

aside Afan Oromo and talk in the government's work language [Amharic]' (YZ 66). Anole is disappointed and hates Gutema, as a result. The narrator adds that Gutema does so in order to disappoint Anole: far from collaborating with Anole, Gutema wants to take military action against the Oromo farmers in order to win him fame and favour with the government. When Anole realizes this, he exclaims, 'do not forget that these people are your own folk' (YZ 69), to which Gutema's responds, 'My people are the whole Ethiopian people. I fight any force that goes against the interest of the Ethiopian government' (Ibid). For Gutema, it is a sign of disloyalty to speak any language other than Amharic. His view reflects the ideology of the monolingual Ethiopianists, who believe speaking a language other than Amharic or multilingualism is a threat to the national unity.

Oromo appears powerfully twice more in this chapter as part of Burqa's multilingual local. Once as an Oromo proverb that Anole uses to urge the Oromo of Burqa to remain patient after Waqo is killed. As the spy that Gutema has employed to inform on Anole reports, 'What didn't Anole say? He said again and again, ''only the patient is able to drink the milk of a young cow which has not yet given birth to a calf.''[166] He repeated this statement throughout his speech' (*YZ* 83).[167] Within a conversation reproduced in Amharic—though it is taking place in Afan Oromo—the Oromo proverb irrupts as a marker of credibility (of the information) and of authenticity of the words of local people. This is because the proverb is powerful reflection of the people's worldview(Jeylan 2005; Sumner 1995, 1996).

The second trace is the Oromo folk song called *jalota* sung by men, women, elders, and youngsters in the Burqa, who come together and sing alternating the lines of the song

[166] 'ኦብሳቱ አናን ጎሮንሳ ዱጋ።'

[167] The part in italics is the Oromo proverb,transliterated in the Sabean script; see below for a discussion of the politics and poetics behind the use of different scripts in this novel.

among themselves.[168] The song is presented in Afan Oromo though transliterated in the Sabean script:

ጎልማሶቹና ወጣቶች
‘ቡርቃ ሲጋአ’
‘የሮን ጌሴ ጂራ ቡርቃ’ ይላሉ።
ሽማግሌዎች በሚንቀጠቀጥ ድምፃቸዉ ይቀሰቅሳሉ።
‘አሰላምሌኩም
ዋቀዮ መራን ፍራ
ዲኒ ኬኛ አርባጉጉ ጂራ
አማሪ ቡርቃ ጂራ
ቆንጨራ ካስኔ ጭራ’
ሴቶችስ መች ዝም አሉ ?
‘ኤልመኮ አኖሌ ኤሳጅርታ
ኢንታላቶ ሀወኒ ኤሳጅርታ’[169]
***

The adults and youngsters sing:
‘Burqa, please, time is up!’
‘It’s enough, please wake up!’
Then the elders take turn with quivering voices:
‘Asalamalekum…[170]
God is a friend to all
5 Our enemy resides in Arbagugu[171]
They (the Amhara) dwell in Burqa
We will chop them up.’
When did women ever keep silent!?
‘Where are you, Anole our son?’
‘Where are you, Hawani our daughter?’

Three other versions of this song are presented in the novel (on page 57, 76 and 376), with some lines dropped or added or slightly modified according to the context, and with only the first version translated. Contextual narratology contributes to our understanding of the song: the song is sung in the 1980s and reflects not only the historical conflict between the Oromo and Amhara but also the Derg linguistic policy of

[168] As mentioned in Chapter 1, *jalota* is a recitative folk song performed communally during the time of war.
[169] *YZ*, 55 (emphasis is mine). The lines in bold, in Amharic, indicated the narrator’s comments; the direct quotations are in Afan Oromo.
[170] Arabic greeting.
[171] A place in the Arsi-Oromo region in central Ethiopia where Amhara immigrants live.

script homogenization, so that all languages were forced to be written in the Sabean script. The repetition of the song untranslated enhances the multilingual effect and the strength of Oromo popular feeling.

The second multilingual local in the novel is Asmara, and the presence and use of languages other than Amharic there reflects the larger political play. Rosa, the sister of Anole's Eritrean friend, stuns him by saying, as they are chatting in Amharic about their respective capitals, 'your 'Finfine'—the Oromo name for Addis Ababa (*YZ* 186). Rosa uses the word self-consciously, in order to win Anole's trust. But her use also shows that their respective parties, the EPLF and OLF, share the same colonial narrative about Ethiopia. Both Rosa and Anole speak Amharic, which is not their mother tongue, but here their multilingualism is a means to develop political solidarity.

In the novel, Hawani engages in debates and discussions about language policy and multilingualism. Though brought up in Burqa like Anole, Hawani is disconnected from the local community, and her multilingual performances occur all outside Burqa. In order to write Hayelom's biography, Hawani travels to northern Ethiopia, particularly the Tigray region, in order to gather first-hand information about him. Like any other student in Ethiopia, Hawani's multilingualism began at school, where she studied first in Amharic and then English. In Tigray and after joining the TPLF, she is keen to learn Tigrinya, her fourth language after Afan Oromo, Amharic and English. She often visits and chats with the local schoolchildren, who are, by contrast, monolingual.[172]

Hawani's most explicit reflection on language is in her presentation in Naqamte, in western Oromia, in Chapter 9 (see Ch. 1), at the conference organized by the TPLF and the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) to inform the people about their

[172] 'The school children, specially Shewit love Hawani. They surround her and laugh at her Tigrinya. Hawani stammers a few Tigrinya words that she has been able to pick. This amuses the children but is language practice for Hawani. The children are surprised by Hawani's inability to speak Tigrinya though she is an adult. That a person of Hawani's age is unable to speak the language is an unsolved puzzle for the children' (*YZ* 87).

new ethno-linguistic federalist policies. Hawani begins her presentation by pointing to the drawbacks of the monolingual policies of Haile Selassie's and Mengistu's governments, which non-Amharic speakers found so oppressive. She draws on her personal experience of school:

> Knowing Amharic was considered as evidence of all forms of knowledge and we suffered much over many years. A few of us who were lucky were able to learn the language. But Amharic helped us only up to grade six. At grade seven, Amharic handed us over to English. At that particular grade, all the nations and nationalities in Ethiopian became '*gemed af*' in English.[173]

The phrase '*gemed af*' means 'a person who is not fluent' or 'who has a slow tongue', an offensive designation for non-native Amharic speakers. Hawani's use of the first-person plural makes her own experience echo with that of all non-Amhara children, indeed also of Amhara children when faced with English education.[174] Nor did the limited Derg policy of allowing media broadcasts in some languages alter the basic denial of language rights:

> Merely broadcasting Afan Oromo through radio channels as permitted by the Derg government cannot by itself ensure the rights of the Oromo. The oppression of the Oromo was not because their language was not broadcast through the radio channels. The main problem was a ban imposed on them to prevent them from speaking their language whenever they want to. We demand to be allowed to learn in our language and to be served in our language in the courts.[175]

Yet Hawani's rejoinder is not the imposition of regional or ethnic monolingualism: 'We should not force the non-Oromo minority people who live in the Oromia region, let alone at a country level. The *neftenya* system forced us to speak Amharic; we should not

---

[173] *አማርኛ ማወቅ እንደ እውቀት ተቆጥሮ ባለፉት ዘማናት ሁሉ አፈር ድመ በልተናል። ዕድሌና የተባልን ጥቂቶችም ቋዋንቋዉን እንደምንም ለመድን ፡ አማርና ሊያገለግለን የቻለዉ ግን እስከ ስድስተና ክፍል ብቻ ነበር። ሰባተኛ ክፍል ላይ ተሸመድምዶ ወገቡን ይዞ ለእንግሊዝኛ አስረከበን። ያን ጊዜ ታዲያ ኢትዮጵያ በምትባለዉ ሀገር የሚንኖር ብሄር ብሄረሰቦች ሁሉ ለኢንግሊዝኛ 'ገመድ አፍ' ሆንን።* (YZ 281).

[174] For further discussion about the use of plural pronouns or we-narratives in narrative fiction, see Fludernik (2009) Marcus (2008) and Margolin (2000).

[175] *'ደርግ እንደፈጸመዉ ኦሮምኛ ቋዋንቋዋ በሬድዮ መልቀቅ ብቻ የኦሮሞ መብት መጠበቅ አይቻልም። የኦሮሞ ህዝብ ቋዋቋዋ በሬድዮ ባለመነገሩ አይደለም የተበደለዉ። በቋዋንቋዋው ያሻዉን አለመናገሩ ነዉ ዋነና ችግሩ። በኦሮምኛ እንማር ፤ በኦሮምኛ እንዳኝ ነዉ ጥያቄያችን።'* (YZ, 281).

follow the same line.'[176] Her multilingualism, in this context, is a moderate political line to achieve harmonious coexistence among speakers of different languages.

In conclusion, despite being written in Amharic and employing largely 'translational mimesis' (Sternberg 1981), *Yeburqa Zimita* is a multilingual novel, through its thematic selection (metamultilingualism), narrative choices (spatial imagination, direct speech representation and characterization), and dialogized heteroglossia. It employs multiple techniques of speech representation to evoke multilingual practices, from selective reproduction to verbal transposition, from conceptual reflection to explicit attribution (Sternberg 1981). In the case of the *jalota* song and the song of displacement that Hawani remembers from her Oromo ancestors, the narrator tells us that the characters chant the songs in Afan Oromo and quotes them in Afan Oromo, in the case of *jalota* in the Sabean script, translating it only once. As for the song of displacement, the narrator quotes the song in Afan Oromo in the Latin script and provides a direct translation in Amharic. Though this use of multiple scripts as well as traces of the Oromo language, *Yeburqa Zimita* not only portrays multilingual practices but resists Amharic monologism. Beside invoking historical reality or authenticity, the Oromo wartime and displacement songs are examples of 'dialogised' or 'novelised' heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981), in that they are contextually reworked to serve the purposes of the author and/or the characters. The presence of Afan Oromo in *Yeburqa Zimita* carries several poetic and political functions: it provides political and narrative resistance against monolingualism in general, and more specifically against the Amharic Great Tradition; it evokes a historical reality and authenticity; it works as a means to establish group membership or affiliation to other groups; but it can also be manipulated to reap political benefits or enhance one's career.

[176] '*ለላው ቀርቶ በክልላችን የሚኖሩ ኦሮሞ ያልሆኑ ወንድሞቻችን በኦሮሚኛ ይናገሩ ዘንድ ልናስገድዳቸዉ አይገባም ፡ ፡ የነፍጠኛ ስርዓት እናን አማርኛ እንድንናገር አስገድዶል ፡ ፡ ያኒን ግልባች መፈጸም አይጠበቅብንም*' (YZ, 282).

In my analysis, I have highlighted how its linguistic stance impacts the formal elements of the novel.

3.2.2 ‘*Ati Afaan Qottuu kana beektaa mitii*?’: Multilingual strategies in *Yoomi Laataa?*[177]

ይህ ነዉ ምኞቴ እኔ በሕይቴ [*sic*]	It is the dream of my life,
ከራሴ በፊት ለኢትዮጵያ እናቴ	Valuing Mother Ethiopia above myself.
ረዥሙን ጉዞ ጥንቱን አዉቄ	Realising the long journey to freedom,
ተነስቼአለሁ ትጥቄን አጥብቄ (*YL*, 227)	My arms are fastened, I am ready to fight.

***

Yeroo asoosama kana barreessaa ture, ani yaada hedduminnaa afaanii karaa asoosama kiyyaatin ibsa jedhu sammuu koo keessaa hinqabu ture. Garuu kaayyoon kiyya, osoo mootummaan namoota akka Afaan Amaaraa qofaan haasawan dhiibbaa irraan gayuu, akkaataa namoonni bara sana afaan garagaraa haasawaa turan qabatamaan dhiyeessuu ture.[178]

When I was composing this novel, I had no idea of representing multilingualism through it. Nevertheless, what I wanted to do, as I have argued elsewhere, was to capture how people really used languages in different social contexts regardless of the imposition of Amharic.

(Isayas Hordofa, December 2018)

This Amharic ‘song of national pledge’ opens Chapter 12 of *Yoomi Laataa?* The chapter presents the last days of the Derg government, when the war with the liberation fronts (EPLF, TPLF, OLF and other fronts) and the Somalian government of Siad Barre became intensified. In response, the Derg government conscripted young people over 18 and sent them to the battlefields with only very short and limited training. In the chapter, 300,000 young soldiers recruited from different ethnic groups, who have completed the training and are gathered for the ceremony, sing this song. The comment by the extradiegetic narrator that follows the song explicitly reflects that Ethiopia is multinational state but dominated by the Amhara.[179] The presence of this Amharic song

---

[177] This is a question posed by Getaw in *Yoomi Laataa?* and it is to mean ‘You (Wariyo) know this farmer’s language, do not you?’

[178] Interview with Isayas Hordofa (December 2018).

[179] ‘These national military forces were recruited from different nations across Ethiopia. Though they sing that they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sovereignty of Ethiopia, that Ethiopia is not a country in

in Sabean script within the Oromo novel *Yoomi Laataa?* contrasts with the Oromo song of displacement in *Yeburqa Zimita* that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Unlike the song of displacement, this song does not represent ideological resistance but rather the hegemony of Amharic. While the presence of Amharic in an Afan Oromo text is not unusual, that of the Sabean script most definitely is. (Historically, Oromo writers were the first to refuse to write in the Sabean script.) Isayas's view about his presentation of the song highlights historical authenticity and his realistic approach to the incident. Yet script makes the multilingual trace more remarkable. Given that Isayas used the Latin script to write Amharic elsewhere in the novel, this particular trace of the Sabean script carries significant political implications and evokes the oppressive nationalism of the time, which was reflected also in language and script. The absence of direct translation increases the spectral quality of the nationalist feeling the song invokes, which is both familiar and eerie.

In this section, I argue that *Yoomi Laataa?* also draws on textual strategies like mixing scripts, and narrative strategies of spatial imagination, characterization and character system, and direct speech representation in order to represent multilingual practices. However, being outside the Amharic literary tradition, *Yoomi Laataa?* reacts to the Amhara mainstream from the peripheral, yet strong, position of the Oromo literary tradition. Therefore, the reasons and the implications underwriting the representation of multilingualism in this novel are quite different from *Yeburqa Zimita*.

Space is the most important narrative element in *Yoomi Laataa?*, and contributes not only of its representation of Ethiopian history (Ch. 2), but also of multilingual practices across different historical times. Like *Yeburqa Zimita, Yoomi Laataa?* presents

---

which all its ethnic groups have equal rights and benefit equally from its resources. While they are still dominated by the Amhara ruling class, the trainees celebrate an Ethiopia that favours only one ethnic group over the others. They continue living a miserable life.' (YL,227)

multilingualism as inhering to different local spaces, but its Oromo perspective inflects some same multilingual local (like Naqamte) in particular ways. The plot connects several linguistic regions, while the narrative is sensitive to language use in each of them. As we saw in Chapter 2, the novel ignores northern Ethiopia but focuses on the eastern region, the diaspora context, and on central and western Ethiopia. The movement or migration of characters across these linguistic regions is the biggest cause for their multilingualism.

The main plot begins in the eastern region of Hararge, where the majority of the population speak Afan Oromo. Sintolinna and her son Sandaba become multilingual only after they move to Addis Ababa after they join Getaw's Amhara family. Fiqir and her twin sons, who were born in Addis Ababa as monolingual Amharic speakers, become multilingual after they move to Naqamte in the Wallaga region of western Ethiopia, where the population speaks Afan Oromo. Greater mobility causes greater multilingualism, as in the case of Mariyana, who is born an Afan Oromo speaker but becomes a speaker of five languages while his exile in Khartoum.

The novel is also attentive to regional differentiation among Oromo speakers, as well as to the hierarchy and politics associated with this linguistic variation. Wariyo, who is from the southern Borana area of Oromia, Getaw and Sintolinna from Hararge, and Eliyas from Wallaga all speak different Oromo dialects. Whereas for educated Oromo characters like Wariyo and Sandaba different Oromo dialects are only linguistic variations caused by geographical difference, Getaw uses such linguistic variations to break Oromo unity by presenting them as different people that need another common language, Amharic, a proposition that Wariyo forcefully resists.

Language is an important part of characterization in the novel. Characters come from different linguistic backgrounds; many of them are multilingual, and the narrator comments on the characters' attitude towards language or on the languages they *cannot* speak. By showing so many characters to be multilingual and characterizing

monolingual Amharic characters who look down upon other languages, like Befirdu and Lydia, as narrow-minded, the novel takes multilingualism to be a lived reality. It also critiques monolingual ideology as flawed by exposing the challenges that monolingual characters face in their daily life and the conflict caused by such a policy, including the Ethiopian Civil War. Discussions among the key characters reveal the pitfalls of the monolingual policy of the Derg government.

Unlike *Yeburqa Zimita*, which presents the language policies of the Haile Selassie and Mengistu regimes, *Yoomi Laataa?* mostly focuses on the Derg/Mengistu government's language policy and shows how the government used the policy to entrap and eliminate parties and individuals who promoted the languages and cultures of their ethnic groups. Eritreans, Tigrayans and Oromos are called anarchists, narrow nationalists and secessionists, and therefore become 'enemies' of the Ethiopian unity mainly because of their demand for linguistic and cultural rights. The Derg associates multilingualism with ethnic politics and labels it a threat that will destroy the unity of the country and needs to be suppressed.

Now I turn to the presentation of multilingual practices and language ideology in each selected multilingual local in *Yoomi Laataa?* The main plot begins in the eastern part of the country, Hararge region and reaches Khartoum in Sudan and finally ends in Addis Ababa. Viewed from the perspective of language ideology, the novel narratively and textually contests monolingual policy in Ethiopia across different regimes. Now I turn to five multilingual locals in which multilingual practices and language ideologies are put into discussion.

The first multilingual local we encounter in *Yoomi Laataa?*, the Hararge region of eastern Ethiopia, immediately makes three important points about multilingualism and language policy through the characters and encounters between Amhara speakers Mindaysil and his son Getaw, and the Oromo character Sintolinna. First, it shows how the monolingual policy was not successful and was unable to control Oromo language.

Second, it shows speakers of the dominant language, Amharic, who have to become multilingual when they live among speakers of the less privileged (or dominated) language, an unusual practice, at least, in literature. It is the Amhara aristocrat landlords who have to learn Afan Oromo. Lastly, this multilingual local exposes the negative language ideology of Amhara speakers, who hold negative attitude towards Afan Oromo and derogatively address it as *Afaan Qottuu,* the language of farmers though they still speak it. Living among the largest Oromo community, Mindaysil, a soldier in Menelik's army, realises that Amhara children are bound to be linguistically influenced by Afan Oromo and learn to speak it and forbids his son Getaw from speaking it. Though Getaw does learn to speak Afan Oromo, he calls it the farmer's language, just like his father, a demeaning view that the novel contrasts through Getaw's driver, Wariyo. As I have argued (Ch. 2), the lively dialogue between Wariyo and Getaw shows the novel employing dialogism to effectively counter Getaw's linguistic prejudice.

Contact between characters and mobility produce multilingualism. It is because of Sintolinna's meeting with Getaw and Wariyo that we learn that Getaw can speak Afan Oromo. The conversation in Afan Oromo between Getaw, Wariyo and Sintolinna shows that Getaw did not heed to his father's advice, though he was influenced by his father's belief about the low status of Afan Oromo. When he asks, *'Waariyoo! Ati afaan Qottuu kana ni beektaa mitii?'* (25) (Wariyo! You know this farmers' language, don't you?), Getaw speaks of Afan Oromo just as derogatorily as his father. When Wariyo challenges his master's stereotypical understanding of the Hararge Oromo and their language, Getaw rejects his explanation: 'No, Wariyo you are wrong, the Hararge are farmers. They are different from your people, the Borana' (Ibid).[180] His insistence on this view of the Oromo in Hararge reveals the extent to which the language hierarchy

[180] The Borana are one of the Oromo groups who live in southern Ethiopia.

implicit in Amhara language ideology has affected his attitudes towards other languages and people. Consciously or unconsciously, Getaw practices a *divide et impera* distinction between the Borana and the Hararge, whereas Wariyo sets up a united Afan Oromo identity, as I have mentioned earlier. This encounter in largely Oromo-monolingual Hararge shows that language influence does not come only from the dominant group but may come from the subordinate majority. Mobility enhances the possibility of multilingualism even within the monolingual context. Though unique in Ethiopian *literature,* the case of Getaw, an Amhara person learning Afan Oromo, is a unique textual trace of a more common practice, and also is a sign of possibility. Through him, the novel here reflects on the socio-linguistic context but also suggests an alternative to the linguistic order.

Addis Ababa is another multilingual local in the novel. At Getaw's residence we find both multilingual and monolingual speakers. There Sintolinna, a monolingual Oromo speaker, encounters monolingual Amhara speaker Lidya, who is harsh towards non-Amharic speakers and warns Sintolinna not to speak Afan Oromo. When multilingual workers who help translate between Lidya and Sintolinna are no longer there, Sintolinna, who has lower social status, is forced to learn Amharic, the language of her master. Though Amharic dominates in Getaw and Lidya's home, some multilingualism persists even there, where monolingual Amhara ideology is stronger. In fact, Sintolinna's son Sandaba, who becomes multilingual after moving from his Afan Oromo speaking monolingual birthplace in Hararge to Getaw's Amharic monolingual family in Addis Ababa, as he grows up becomes very critical of Amhara monolingual policies and the marginalisation of the Oromo people and their language under the successive regimes.

In two scenes, Sandaba clearly articulates his views of language. As mentioned earlier, the Oromo characters form a secret mini-Oromo community that surreptitiously speaks

Afan Oromo in Getaw's household. On several informal gatherings, they discuss the history of Oromo nationalism, their Oromo identity, language and many other topics relating to the Oromo culture (see Ch. 2). These discussions shape Sandaba's views and introduce him to Oromo world views and identity politics. In one of the occasions at Getaw's residence, Sandaba, reflects that Afan Oromo is the largest widely spoken language in Ethiopia but was unfairly marginalized by Haile Selassie's government.

Sandaba's process of political maturing symbolises the historical development of the Oromo nationalism, particularly its linguistic aspect. Sandaba was born speaking Afan Oromo but was blocked from speaking it under Amhara domination during Haile Selassie's regime. His experience echoes Haile Selassie's language policy, under which people were forced not to speak other languages, as Lidya's injunction exemplifies. The collapse of Haile Selassie's regime results into the easing of this enforced monolingualism, narratively represented by the removal of restrictions on the use of Afan Oromo, at least in the private spheres, among the Oromo characters after the death of Lidya. Sandaba's views eventually become a critique of language policy during the Derg era. This takes us to another location, the town of Ambo about 100 km west of Addis Ababa in central Ethiopia (see Ch. 2).
This is a conflicted multilingual local. The rural population around Ambo speaks Afan Oromo, and Sandaba uses it when meeting the farmers there in his role as campaigner of the Derg's land reform. Interestingly, the Amhara landlord Befirdu who resents the reform confronts Sandaba about language: 'Can't you understand that I am speaking Amharic? I am not speaking *Gallinya*', he says.[181] And when Sandaba replies, 'Please do not say *Gallinya*, say Afan Oromo', Befirdu taunts him using an old, derogatory term for the language, 'Even if you call it Afan Oromo, will it be stop being *Galla*? *Galla* is *Galla*'

[181] The term 'Galla' is discussed by Jaenen (1956) in detail and he has shown that it was originally debasing and derogatory.

(103). As we saw earlier from Hawani's report in *Yeburqa Zimita,* Derg reforms included a new language policy, which enabled 15 languages to be broadcast on national state television. Befirdu's provocative remark stems from his anger at Sandaba and his friends, whom he sees as representing Derg reforms. Befirdu's remark reverberates dialogically with a similar assertion by Asnaqe in *Yeburqa Zimita*, who is selected to lead the Amhara's force against the Oromo farmers. Asnaqe claims 'since the [Derg] government broadcast in their language on its radio, they started to feel superior' (YZ,59). These statements by Amhara characters shows their resistance to the Derg's policy of limited multilingualism which, they fear, will erode Amhara superiority and emboldened groups so far remained subordinate.

As Sandaba becomes more and more political, he joins two political parties—first the EOPRS and later the OLF—which advocate ethnic identity. After the Inango cultural ceremony I discussed in Chapter 2, members of the EOPRS are targeted by the Derg. His wife Fiqir's confusion as to why he is always in trouble with the Derg leads Sandaba to explain the linguistic demands of the EOPRS:

> As far as language is concerned, the Oromo, for example, make up 40% of the Ethiopian population. Yet though they are the most populous ethnic group in the country, their language is denied the status of a national language. Instead, it is the language of the second most populous ethnic group, Amharic, that is the only national language. This is not a democratic policy. We demand that Afan Oromo be given equal status to Amharic so that we can have a bilingual state. All democratic states in the world have more than one national language. We need to follow the same trend.[182]

Sandaba's dialogic argument about the unfairness of the preference for Amharic exposes the Derg's multilingual policy as a sham and draws on proportional

---

[182] '*Dhimma afaan ilaaluunis Oromoon Itoophiyaa kana keessa sabaafi sablammoota akkasumas ummattoota jiran keessaa 40% taha. Saba guddaa ta'ee osoo jiruu afaan biyyoolessaa ta'uuf mirga hin ardanne. Garuu Oromootti aanee baay'inna ummataan lammaffaa kan ta'e Afaan Amaaraatti afaan biyyoolessaa ta'ee akka tajaajilu godhamee itti hojjetamaa jera. Haalli kun hojiimaata dimookiraatawaa miti. Oromiffaas Amaariffaas kun dubbatan ummata baay'ee waan tahaniif Afaan Oromoos Afaan Amaaraa wajjiin afaan hojii biyyoolessaa tahuu qaba. Biyyooti dimokiraatoti adduunyaa baayi'een afaan hojii biyyoolessaa tokko ol qabu'* (*YL*, 146, 147).

representativity to suggest an alternative policy. Sandaba's language ideology here represents the position of Oromo nationalists during the Derg regime. Naqamte, and Wallaga in general, are a centre of strong opposition to Amharic monolingualism in the novel, to the extent people refuse to speak it outside the government institutions. Another (Oromo) character there, Eliyas Hordofa, who was born in Naqamte, studied in Asmara, Eritrea, and then became a teacher (and later a reporter) in Afan Oromo, embodies Afan Oromo language right as a form of resistance and exposes the Derg's so called 'multilingual' policy as a sham. In Chapter 7 of *Yoomi Laataa?* Eliyas contravenes classroom regulations by greeting the students in Afan Oromo and sometimes using the language for teaching. Although almost all the students speak Afan Oromo, the narrator tells us, Amharic alone is used in classrooms and offices. The school and loyalist teachers officially accuse Eliyas of violating the school's language policy because of his 'narrow view that will ruin the country'.[183] By calling Eliyas' use of the students' first language 'a narrow view'/ 'narrow mindedness', the teachers politicise the incident, given that in the political context of the time, the term 'narrow minded', along with other terms like 'secessionist', 'anarchist', and 'outlaw' was repeatedly used by the Derg officials to designate Eritrean, Tigrayan and Oromo liberation fighters. The novel cites such incriminatory labelling in various chapters, but Eliyas' incident is the only one to support the metamultilingual critique of the Derg policy. Eliyas is saved by the Oromo teachers who try to cool down the matter. In short, Sandaba and Eliyas represent different forms of linguistic resistance to Amharic monolingualism in Wallaga,

[183] While the Ethiopian government education policy allows only Amharic to be used in schools, teacher Eliyaas has been found to be teaching in Oromo language and this is a violation of the education policy of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. Eliyas is motivated to do this by his *narrow view* (narrow mindedness) that will ruin the country' ('*Sirni barnootaa mootummaa Itoophiyaa Afaan Amaaraatiin tahee utuu jiruu Barsiisaa Eliyaas garuu ilaalcha* ***dhiphummaa*** *kan tokkummaa [biyyaa] diiguun kakka'uudhaan sirna barumsaa ministeera barumsaa Itoophiyaa alatti Afaan Oromootiin barsiisaa jiru*', *YL*, 120, my emphasis).

through personal and direct action (Eliyas), or through reflection and political critique (Sandaba).

The final multilingual local in *Yoomi Laataa?* is, as in *Yeburqa Zimita,* an exilic one, created by the Derg dictatorship which pushes characters to escape from the Civil War abroad. The exilic locale in *Yoomi Laataa?* is Khartoum, in Sudan, an uncommon choice for an Oromo novel. One very small scene in Khartoum is presented by *Yoomi Laataa?* and it is a rich case of what I would like to call 'free multilingualism', that is, when people learn and use other languages out of their free will. Alkitil and Alkuma, Sandaba's sons, who have fled to Sudan and are being helped by Saba, an Eritrean woman who used to know Sandaba at Addis Ababa University (see Ch. 2), meet there Mariyana, another Oromo man. Saba introduces Alkitil and Alkuma to Mariyana, who she thinks may help them find Sandaba. Mariyana begins by using all the languages he thinks the teenagers understand:

> '*Anee!* ***Mariyannaa zibihaal'*** **[**I am Mariyana] he said in Tigrinya, thinking that the two boys were Saba's Tigrayan Eritrean brothers.' ***'Okkee men simkum?*** **What is your name?'** Mariyana asked for the boys' names in both Tigrinya and English. [… Saba said] 'Mariyana, forget Arabic and Tigrinya, talk to them in your own language. They are your own folk'.[184]

In this passage Mariyana speaks four languages, Tigrinya, Afan Oromo, English, and Arabic; Saba also seems to know all these languages.

His multilingual practice is due to his ignorance of the boys' background. The presence of the teenagers with an Eritrean girl makes him to think that they are related to her and must understand Tigrinya, Saba's first language. Then, misunderstanding their names

[184] *'Anee!* ***Mariyannaa zibihaal*** *' Jedhe. Erga obboloota ishee taahanii Tigiroota Eritiraadha jedhee Tigiriffaan itti dubbachuu isaati.*
*'**Okkee men simkum? What is your name?'***
'eenyu maqaan keessanii?' ittiin jedhe Tigiriffaa fi Ingiliffaan. […]
'Mariyannaa! Afaan Arabaas, Afaan Tigirootaas dhiisiitii afaan kessaniin itti dubbadhu. Isaan lammii keetii' Ittiin jette (YL, 236, 237, emphases mine)

as Arabic since they start with 'al', the narrator tells us, Mariyana thinks that they must be the Sudanese and he greets them in Arabic. The teenagers, who have recently arrived in Khartoum and have no knowledge of either Tigrinya or Arabic, do not reply, and finally it is Saba who provides information about their ethnolinguistic background and tells Mariyana, what language he should use. Though all of them, Ethiopian refugees, can speak Amharic, the narrator adds that, none of them uses it, because for all of them Amharic is 'the language of the oppressors' (Alemseged 2013:236). This is one of the most multilingual scenes in the novel and it demonstrates the fluidity of linguistic interaction and accommodation in the absence of monolingual policy restrictions. In this context, multilingualism is a sign of freedom.

In conclusion, like *Yeburqa Zimita*, *Yoomi Laataa?* presents encounters and contacts between characters from different regions, cultures, and languages of Ethiopia—and their travels across linguistic and cultural borders—creating various patterns of multilingualism as part of lived reality. Official monolingualism is shown as pervading the consciousness of Amhara characters and lurking behind the Derg's policy of limited multilingualism. It is the source of much grievance and conflict, and the use of Afan Oromo as a form of linguistic and political against Amhara domination is a major theme in the novel. Sandaba's political growth begins and ends with language.

By comparison, *Yeburqa Zimita,* written in Amharic, challenges its linguistic domination, the established monologism of Amharic literature, and the linguistic homogenizationthat does not tolerate writing Ethiopian languages in any other script but Sabean and repressively efface names, toponyms and terms in other languages. Unlike other non-Amharic writers, the author Tesfaye Gebreab repurposes Amharic itself and makes it accommodating of other languages, deliberately flouting the protocols and standards of Amharic and opening it to multilingual heteroglossia. Written in Afan Oromo in the Latin script, *Yoomi Laataa?* takes a different course. The

presence of Amharic and other languages does not aim at resisting Oromo monolingualism but rather at evoking historical and social multilingual contexts and showing the domination of Amharic.[185] And since Oromo readers, especially high school and university students, are familiar with Amharic with varying degrees of proficiency, Afan Oromo novels aiming at realistic representation of socio-political contexts can hardly avoid Amharic phrases and terms. In fact, from a stylistics point of view, incorporating Amharic in the Sabean script in *Yoomi Laataa?* can be interpreted as a degree of resistance to the politics of writing Afan Oromo only in the Latin Script and the outright rejection of the Sabean script.[186] Importantly, both novels share the same goal, and view resisting linguistic homogenization and Amharic monolingualism and reflecting multilingual reality and practices as crucial aspects of their critique of Ethiopian nationalism.

[185] Just like Nigerian writers Achebe and Nwapa 'effectively enhance[ed] the verisimilitude of their stories about pre-independence rural Nigeria by inserting Igbo songs, greetings, titles, clothing and food items, and other such culturally specific items' (Bekers, 2014:122).
[186] Isayas vehemently objected to the idea of writing Afan Oromo in the Sabean script (Interview with Isyas, December 2018).

3.3 At the margin of official monolingualism: 'small-scale multilingualism' in the village novels

The two village novels *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* present multilingualism circumscribed within specific villages and small-scale societies such as the Gumuz in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* and the Kuyegu and Hamar in *Evangadi*. Though they focus on small-scale societies, the two novels highlight the remarkable linguistic diversity of Ethiopia that has often remained out of sight of mainstream scholars and writers. The small-scale societies presented by these two novels can be considered examples of multilingual locals, but of what Friederike Lüpke calls 'small-scale multilingualism', which is free from the influence of the official monolingualism. According to Lüpke (2016:35), small-scale multilingualism includes

> communicative practices in heteroglossic societies in which multilingual interaction is not governed by domain specialization and hierarchical relationships of the different named languages and lects used in them, but by deeply rooted social practices within a meaningful geographic setting. These settings are mainly attested in areas of the globe that have been spared from Western settlement colonies.[187]

Among the the Baïnounk in Senegal, studied by Lüpke (2016), 'languages do not express identity in essentialist fashion, as in Western language ideologies. Rather, languages are used in indexical fashion and multilingualism is a social strategy that enables speakers to index different identities to different stakeholders' (48). In the Ethiopian context, such small-scale multilingualism characterizes societies on the economic and political peripheries where the influence of the Amhara is absent, such as the remote areas of the south-western and western Ethiopia, which are where the two

[187] Lüpke (2016) defines small-scale multilingualism as the 'balanced multilingualism practiced in meaningful geographical spaces sustaining dense interaction and exchange at their interior. Small-scale multilingualism is attested mainly in areas not or relatively recently exposed to Western settlements and Western ideas of nation states and standard language ideologies. Although these areas were drawn into globalization just as settlement colonies were, the absence or recency of large numbers of colonists has resulted in the survival of areas practicing this particular form of multilingualism, which could also be called indigenous multilingualism' (2016:41).

Afan Oromo and Amharic novels, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* and *Evangadi,* are set. Small-scale multilingualism can take different forms—'reciprocal, passive, receptive, and ritual'.[188] What characterizes the two novels, and more specifically *Evangadi*, is what Lüpke calls 'reciprocal multilingualism', which from perspective of language ideology involves a more egalitarian and accommodating understanding of languages.[189]

Evangadi presents small-scale multilingual practices at the level of individual characters and their communities, while *Gurraacha Abbayaa* focuses on multilingual individuals, highlighting also the author's multilingual skills. Social and economic interaction underpin small-scale multilingualism in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* and in *Evangadi* (sharing resources like water and grass for the cattle). Interestingly, both novels focus on societies other than those to which the authors belong: while the Amharic *Evangadi* takes an explicit ethnographic interest in the Kuyegu and Hamar of south-western Ethiopia and features a professional anthropologist among its protagonists, in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* the ethnographic interest is less overt. Nonetheless, this novel is remarkable for being the first novel in Afan Oromo that deals with a social group other than the Oromo. The contexts they present hardly overlap, and they benefit from a separate discussion, followed by a comparative reading together.

[188] These categories of small-scall multilingualism, for Lüpke, are to be taken as 'ideologically motivated idealizations' rather than as 'characterizations of language use in these societies' (2016:47).

[189] 'Multilingual speakers of village-based patrimonial languages [who] are often very accommodating and see multilingualism as an integral part of their identity; these traits are shared across the region and create a particular language attitude prizing multilingualism irrespective of the exact repertoires. This mutually shared ideology fosters reciprocal repertoires' (Ibid., 51).

3.3.1 When the centre encounters the peripheries: 'Individual and societal multilingualism' in *Evangadi*[190]

The Amharic novel *Evangadi* (1998) presents the village life of the Hamar people and their south-western Ethiopian neighbours such as the Kuyegu, the Mursi, and the Erbore. The south-western part of Ethiopia is economically, infrastructurally and politically marginalized. The peoples who live there have been excluded both from mainstream political discourse and from literary studies. They are 'unknown' to mainstream Ethiopian literary studies and are usually presented as having no literature.[191] It is the writings and films of Fiqremarqos Desta, including *Evangadi*, that have introduced the peoples who live in this remote part of the country to mainstream Ethiopian literary studies, and *Evangadi* occasionally refers to Ethiopia and Africa—and not particularly these small-scale societies—as 'forgotten' or 'unknown' places.

The novel backs up this claim by highlighting on different communities and in specific local areas. Fiqremarqos Desta is among the few individuals to have visited the area out of academic and artistic curiosity. He lived with the Hamar for several years in the 1990s and claims to be a Hamar man. This helps him to present the Hamar's stories from an insider-outsider point of view. By setting his novels among such peripheral communities, Fiqremarqos departs from the Amharic literary canon, which has tended to either only describe the experiences of Amharic-speaking people, or to describe non-Amharic speaking people in pejorative terms. To my knowledge, Fiqremarqos is the

---

[190] By individual and societal multilingualism, I mean multilingualism reflected in individual characters and communities, but still within small-scale multilingualism. I took these terms from Jasone Cenoz (2013:5), who describes it:'Multilingualism is at the same time an individual and a social phenomenon. It can be considered as an ability of an individual, or it can refer to the use of languages in society. Individual and societal multilingualism are not completely separated. It is more likely that the individuals who live in a multilingual community speak more than one language than for individuals who live in a monolingual society.'

[191] Donald Levine (1973) calls them the 'unknown' peoples of Ethiopia, while for Clapham (2002) they only have anthropology, not history or literature.

first Amhara author to write about non-Amhara people without negatively portraying them. His innovation involves not only theme and setting but also the character system—his novel's characters are rounded and believable in terms of the cultures of the local people. Already the title *Evangadi* indexes a core cultural form of the Hamar people, an influential night dance of the Hamar people usually accompanied by cultural folk songs.

The theme of cultural contact and adaptation (or misadaptation) is central to the novel—whether of small-scale societies to the foreign world as well as with mainstream Ethiopian centres (mainly through slavery and migration) or of foreign and Ethiopian ethnographers with these remote small-scale societies (mainly through academic interest or in search of one's roots). *Evangadi* has two main plotlines. One is the story of a Kuyegu man, Edward Lokaye, who was taken out of his community into slavery when he was only a small child. He finds his new life in Spain unbearable and is unable to adapt to Western life condition. Although Lokaye does not even know what his original country, he never stops thinking about it. He does not remember the country's name, only the colour of the flag, and is reminded of it whenever he sees a rainbow. With the help of his Spanish wife, he attends the historic Olympic held in Rome in 1960 and watches the Ethiopian athlete Abebe Biqila win the marathon. Lokaye recognizes the flag being held by Abebe and hears the name of Ethiopia mentioned, and afterwards he remembers. The event helps him learn the name of his country, but by then Lokaye is too old to travel there. He eventually hands over the task of discovering his country and finding his relatives to his granddaughter Konchiti Peso Beni, when she is only about 7 years old.

When she gets older, Konchiti decides to find the relatives of her grandfather. She is helped by another Ethiopian immigrant to Spain, Sora Galcha, who she meets by chance. Sora is originally from the Erbore in south-western Ethiopia; he moved to Addis for his studies but soon grew dissatisfied with his life there and migrated to Spain to work and

improve himself. When Konchiti tells Sora about her plan to travel to Ethiopia in search of grandfather's relatives, he decides to help her. After a long and dreary journey along the lower part of the Omo River, Konchiti and Sora meet Delti, a young man from the Hamar land who has recently moved to the Kuyegu land (Kuchiru). Sora knows a few Hamar words, and that helps him to communicate with Delti, who helps them find Lokaye's relatives.

One very important point in this plotline is that the inability of various characters to adapt to the culture of the local people. Lokaye is portrayed as someone unable to understand western culture, while his Spanish wife characterizes him as a child and immature. Konchiti also faces similar problem in the Kuyegu land, and she, too, considers the Kuyegu like children. The narrative does present them as childish when they fail to understand that a photograph of Lokaye wearing a scarf: although Konchiti tells them he is dead, from the photograph they believe that Lokaye is still alive and that the scarf on his neck is a white snake that disappeared from their land long years ago and take it as a sign of peace. They believe that Lokaye will come back with the white snake and that he is a grateful man who never forgot his people. Sora and Konchiti also have cultural misunderstandings, though more of a psychological nature. They also have linguistic misunderstandings when they arrive in Kuchiru, until Delti come to their rescue (see below). The characterization of a culture one does not know as childish works both ways: Goiti, a Hamar woman who is part of the other plotline of the novel, finds the white people in London just as childish and is unable to understand a culture different from her own.

The other plotline follows a young British female anthropologist, Karlet Alfred who appeared for the first time in Fiqremarqos' first novel, *Kebuska Bertegerba* (*Behind the Buska,* 1995) as a researcher who travelled to the Hamar land for her fieldwork. In *Evangadi*, Karlet comes back to the Hamar land after she presented the results of her fieldwork in the UK. Her plan is to visit her friend Delti, a young Hamar man whom

she befriended during fieldwork. Before she arrives in the territory of the Hamar, Karlet travels to various places in the central and northern Ethiopia. During her trip, she interacts with several people and shares with them her appreciation for Ethiopia's cultural diversity and challenges several characters who hold a negative view of Ethiopia, including a British diplomat in Addis Ababa who considers Ethiopia a poor and backward country. After visiting the old churches and monasteries in northern Ethiopia, Karlet travels to the Hamar land. There she finds that Delti has left Hamar without telling his whereabouts to anyone. Delti's friends and family are preparing a search party, and Karlet promptly joins them. The Hamar elders carry out a divination ritual, which suggests that Delti is in the village of Kuchiru. When the team arrives at Kuchiru, they find Delti celebrating the news about Lokaye with Sora and Konchiti. Karlet is happy to meet Konchiti, whom she had already befriended in Spain, again. Both teams leave for Geneva in Switzerland to participate in a festival, organized by Karlet, promoting Ethiopian multiculturalism. The novel ends with representatives of different Ethiopian ethnic groups in their dressing styles performing their various cultural dances and cultural songs.

Evangadi presents Ethiopia as the home of many peoples with a variety of cultures. Both the narrator and Karlet Alfred call it '*un museo di popoli*' (a museum of peoples), the phrase used by Italian colonial anthropologist Carlo Conti-Rossini. This view, though colonial in nature, challenges the view of Ethiopia 'as an outpost of Semitic civilization', presenting it instead 'as an ethnographic museum' (Levine 1974:17). The novel can in fact be considered a fictional equivalent of the ethnographic research carried out among the peoples in the southern and south-western Ethiopia. Karlet Alfred is a fictional representation of the foreign anthropologists who worked in this part of the country.[192]

[192] Ivo Strecker (1970), a German anthropologist, is one of the popular anthropologists who studied the Hamar and other peoples in this part of Ethiopia.

Karlet is committed to celebrating the rich cultural heritage of Ethiopia and argues that Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Karlet holds a strongly favourable attitude towards multilingualism. Her theoretical view is reflected in her conversation with British diplomat Steve in Addis Ababa. Whereas Steve complains about life in Ethiopia (and particularly about the girls in Addis Ababa who want to form a serious relationship with him!), Karlet blames his attitude on his ignorance of Ethiopian culture, and particularly language:

> If one cannot connect with a people through the bridge of language, one remains unknown and unfriendly to the people; equally, when one knows the language of a people it is easy for one to see their internal beauty. Language heals the wounds between us though the influence that emanates from differences in life experiences, thinking, ways of life and relationships cannot be totally avoided.[193]

Karlet further argues with Steve that Ethiopia is a multilingual and multicultural country, and these are assets that should be appreciated and respected: 'Ethiopia is a home of nations and nationalities. Its cultural diversity is also as many as its peoples, but its unity made it more beautiful so that a foreigner who talks about the behaviour of individuals or a group of people should not generalise an individual's behaviour as Ethiopian behaviour.'[194] For Karlet, multilingualism is a means through which people can create harmonious relationships and increase mutual understanding.

Karlet's views on the Hamar and Ethiopia, as well as her multilingual skills, are mostly told by the narrator. When visiting historical places in northern Ethiopia, Karlet is unable to communicate with the nuns since she cannot speak Amharic and has to rely on her guide to translate. In the Hamar country, instead, the narrator tells us that Karlet greets the Hamar in their language and mentions the phrases she uses.[195] Once she

---

[193] 'ማን ኛዉም ህዝብ ቋንቋን ካወቁ፣ ከተግባቡት ውስጣዊ ዉበቱን ማግኘት እንድሚቻል፣ በቋንቋ ድልድይነት መገናኘት ካልቻሉ ገን አለመቀራረብና አለመተዋወቅ ስለሚኖር መግባባት መጥፋቱና ሆድና ጀርባ መሆን ያለ ነው። የህይወት ልምድ ልዩነት፣ በአስተሳሰብ በአኗኗር ዘይቤ፣ በአቀራርብ... የሚኖረው ተጸእኖ ባይቀርም ቋንቋ ግን በመካከል ያለን ቁስል ያክማል።'(50-51)

[194] 'ኢትዮጵያ ደግሞ የብዙ ብሄር ብሄረሰቦች መኖሪያ፣ባህሏም የዛኑ ያህል የተለያዩ ግ ን ተዋህዶ ጥሩ ቀለም የፈጠረ ነዉና አእድ የዉጭ ዜጋ ስለሰቦች ባሂሪ እያዎራ 'ኢትዮጵያዉያን' በሚል ለደመድም አይገባም።' (51)

[195] 'ነጋ ያ፣ ነኖኖምቤ፣ ቀሎሎምቤ ፈያዎ... ኢንታ ፈያዎ....።' (162)

cannot communicate with a priest although she wants to because there is 'no bridge—the bridge of language' (*E*,156). Linguistic skills are the all-important bridge, for Karlet and the narrator, that allow connections between people.

Unlike Fiqremarqos' previous novel *Behind the Buska* (*Kebuska Bestejerba*, 1995), which dealt with the Hamar culture as presented through a British ethnographer, Karlet Alfred , *Evangadi* deals with the interactions between people living in different villages, as well as countries. The novel gestures at the multilingual practices of ethnolinguistic groups like the Hamar, Kuyegu, Erbore, Amhara, Karo, Mursi, Nyangatom, Bume, and others who live in the neighbourhood of the Hamar. Unless someone comes from outside, like Konchiti, people there easily communicate without linguistic barriers. One main drive for their interactions and, therefore, for multilingual competence is climactic and economic necessity, mainly the dry weather that forces people to move to the areas of the lower Omo river in order to find grass and water for their cattle. The river, the novel reiterates, brings increased interaction between the peoples living nearby and whose survival depends upon it, at least during the dry season. In addition, communities seek out one another because they need an alliance with stronger ethnolinguistic groups. Minority groups like the Kuyegu learn the languages of the stronger ethnic groups for the sake of protection against others, but in fact everyone in the region knows more than one local language.

Delti Geldi, a Hamar man who has moved to Kuchiru in the Kuyegu land, is an example. When Sora and Konchiti arrive in Kuchiru, Delti is the first person that they meet. While they are still discussing whether to talk to him, Delti greets them first in the Karo language (saying 'tsali?', 'how are you?'), and when they do not reply because they do not know Karo, he tries greeting them in the Hamar ('negaya', 214,215). These are among the few direct traces of local languages in the novel and show how Delti can speak Karo and Kuyegu in addition to his mother tongue Hamar and freely switches between the languages. As we have seen, in the novel learning more languages is a

marker of maturity and enhances peaceful coexistence: Delti does not expect the strangers, Sora and Konchiti, to speak his language but accommodates himself to what he assumes is their language.

In the novel, the Kuyegu people are the most multilingual among all ethnolinguistic groups in the area: they speak Hamar, Mursi and Nyangatom languages. Their high degree multilingualism is born out of their relative minority (their total population is 500, *E,* 228) and powerlessness. The Kuyegu shift alliances with other stronger ethnolinguistic groups depending on their needs, the narrator tells us, and this means they learn the language of the group they align with. As the narrator puts it: 'The dancing was not yet over. The Kuyegu not only speak many languages but are skilled multi-dancers. It is their powerlessness that gave them such skills. They can dance Nyangatom, Karo, Mursi and Hamar dances' (*E,* 235). While the Kuyegu case reveals the existence of some linguistic hierarchy, unlike the case of Amharic monolingualism language learning is not imposed by the stronger group but is driven by the need and willingness of the weaker or smaller group. At the same time, as we have seen, Delti, who is a Hamar, also has learnt Kuyegu and Karo.

Two more multilingual characters deserve discussion. One is Sora Galcha, who is dissatisfied with his life in Erbore and later in Addis Ababa. He finds his education useless and also feels guilty for not heeding the advice of Erbore elders to stay in Erbore. When he meets Konchiti in a French restaurant in Spain and Konchiti talks to him in French, Sora is impressed: 'He imagined that the impact of knowing French and English had in expanding her thinking and attitudinal horizon. He knows being a speaker of many languages and being able to read others is one thing that brings about maturity'(*E,* 74). Later, in Kuchiru on the lower Omo River, although Sora is unable to understand a single word of Kuyegu, he can speak a few words of Hamar to communicate with Delti, who connects him and Konchiti to Lokaye's relatives (*E,* 217). For Sora, multilingualism improves mental development, leads to maturity, and positively impacts relationships.

One final minor but significant character is Anteneh Yimer, an Amhara originally from Wollo who has come to the Hamar region for reasons unspecified. What we are told is his new name, Galtambe, which he received after passing through Hamar rites of incorporation. Though we are not told clearly which language Anteneh speaks, we guess that he speaks the Hamar language, and he clearly seems very knowledgeable about Hamar culture. When he and other friends of Delti's do prognostication, Karlet asks him about women's involvement in the community cultural practices. Anteneh uses a Hamar folktale about Hamar deity, Borjo, who cursed women to explain why women are not allowed to intervene in community cultural practices. Since Karlet understands Hamar but not Amharic, we infer that Galtambe must be speaking Hamar. Anteneh is therefore an Amhara who has culturally assimilated and learned the Hamar language. As we found in *Yoomi Laataa?*, this is a unique case of an Amhara speaker, i.e. the speaker of the dominant language, who has learnt language of the minority or dominated group. In so doing, the novel foregrounds 'small-scale multilingualism' which is uncommon practice in Amharic literary tradition.

By focusing on the small-scale societies of the lower Omo river in south-western Ethiopia and their small-scall multilingualism, according to which learning others language is both an economic necessity in the sharing of resources, a means of affiliation and protection, and leads to peaceful coexistence, *Evangadi* makes a broader case in favour of multilingualism, multiculturalism and cultural curiosity and adaptability, as the characters of Karlet and Anteneh, speakers of dominant languages who learn the language of the society with which they want to align themselves, exemplify. Interestingly, both Amharic (in the case Anteneh) and English (in the case Karlet) are narratively silenced in the novel. Although actual multilingual traces in the novel are few, through its location in a multilingual local very far from the usual locations of Amharic novels, and though its character system, this ethnographic

Amharic novel makes a powerful case for multilingualism and multiculturalism within a national framework. The view of Ethiopia as a 'museum of people' and the cultural festival at the end, showcasing the songs and dances of the peoples of the lower Omo river, among others, support this inclusive vision of Ethiopia.

3.3.2 When the peripheries meet each other: Textual and paratextual multilingualism in *Gurraacha Abbayaa*

> Dhaba shows that he is a dedicated student of Oromo mythology with a love and respect for the culture. […] He has ears for the music of the Oromo language, and he uses his talent to translate the dance, music, costume, and proverbs of the people. He brings people—not cultural caricatures—on stage.[196]

This is a testimonial by Ethiopia's poet laurate, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, about Dhaba Wayessa, the author of *Gurraacha Abbayaa*. Though the testimonial is not about this novel, it highlights how Dhaba pays close attention to the culture of the people about which he writes. Unlike his first novel, *Godaannisa* (*The Scar*,1993), which focuses on Oromo characters, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* is set in the village of Mattin in the Gumuz land of western Ethiopia and shows great attentiveness towards Gumuz imaginative expressions and culture. Just as *Evangadi* subverts and innovates the Amharic literary canon, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* moves thematically and spatially beyond the Oromo-centred narratives of the Oromo literary canon, thereby expanding its spatial imagination and thematic horizon. Rather than thematising small-scale multilingualism, *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, I argue, deals with the small-scale society of Gumuz villages and engages in 'translational mimesis' (Sternberg) of Gumuz culture and expressions, thereby inflecting the linguistic texture of this Oromo novel with ample traces of the Gumuz language. It is a novel in which we find the linguistic and literary encounters of two peripheries, the Oromo and Gumuz, both marginalized by mainstream Ethiopian literary studies.

---

[196] This testimony is printed on the back cover of the novel.

Gurraacha Abbayaa's multilingualism starts with its author and the novel's paratexts. It in the preface Dhaba declares that he was born in an Oromo family and the inside cover shows a childhood photo of him with his mother, in the acknowledgements he expresses gratitude towards the Gumuz he met at Qello open market in western Ethiopia. The novel also carries a six-page glossary of Gumuz words where Gumuz words translated into Afan Oromo and English, and literary terms in Afan Oromo are translated into English equivalents. The paratext, then, carries evidence of 'authorial multilingualism', that is the multilingual knowledge of the real author. As for other languages and multilingual characters, references to them are mostly indirect and/or implicit: for example, Gebru, an Amhara character, ordinarily speaks Gumuz, but since he has lived in Amharic-speaking regions outside Gumuz lands we infer that he must know Amharic, too.[197] As it is, he only utters two words in Amharic in the novel.[198]

The plot centres on the conflict between an Amhara man, Gebru Teferra, and a Gumuz man, Bacangire Bakalo, and the subsequent socio-cultural crises experienced by Bacangire's son, Teto. The conflict begins with Gebru's adulterous relationship with a married Gumuz woman called Yalunge, which is offensive in Gumuz culture. The conversations between them are in Gumuz.[199] Gebru is a native speaker of a prestigious language, whereas Yalunge is a speaker of a minor language, but they both speak Gumuz, the minority language. In this village context, there is no hierarchy between the languages, and no policy intervention. Though Gebru shows his disregard for the

---

[197] 'Gebru Teferra is not an easy person. When he was only a child, his parents migrated from Gondar and settled at the foot of Axaballa hill near the Gumuz lands. Rumour has it that they had moved to Gondar from Wollo due to a murder they had committed' *('Gabruu Tafarraa nama laayyoo miti. Ijollummaa isaatii warri isaa Gondorii godaananii, tulluu Axaballaa jala qubatan. Dur gara Wallootii nama ajjeesanii, gumaa baqa achi dhufuu isaanii tu hamatama', GA,*21*).* Since both Gondar and Wollo dominantly speak Amharic, Gebru and his parents must speak Amharic.

[198] When Gebru is killed, he utters a couple of words in Amharic in an expression of tense emotion: '*Ye Teferraa Taayyee lij*' (I am the son of Teferra Taye, *GA*, 25), which are left untranslated.

[199] E.g. Gebru asks Yalunge for a drink in Gumuz: *'Keyaa bi genaa?',* and she responds in Gumuz (*GA*, 8).

Gumuz in some of the songs he sings (see below), he does not speak derogatorily about their language, unlike Getaw, Befirdu and Mindaysil in *Yoomi Laataa*?[200]

The first five chapters of the novel follow the spiral of revenge that involves relatives on both sides. First, Gebru, in his arrogance, escalates the conflict by disclosing the affair and then killing Yalunge's husband, Bacangire's brother. In accordance with Gumuz cultural rules, Bacangire takes revenge, and the retaliations between the two families escalate until both Gebru and Bacangire are killed. The feud ends when Gebru's family destroys Bacangire's village and exterminates all its people and animals. Only two teenage children of Bacangire survive, Doca and Teto. The novel then centres around Teto and the tragic consequences of his violation of Gumuz cultural norms.

Unlike the other Gumuz youngsters, who are extrovert and playful, Teto has been distressed and withdrawn since the early death of his mother. After his father's murder and the destruction of Mattin, Teto and his sister Doca go to live in another Gumuz nearby village, invited by acquaintances of their father's. On the way, they come across several houses of people from other ethnolinguistic groups live, who may be hostile. Here, the mention of the ethnolinguistic groups like the Amhara, Shinasha and Agaw implies to the presence of other languages in the Gumuz land and neighbouring lands.[201] Eventually, Teto and Doca must run away from that Gumuz village, too, when once Doca fears that one of Gebru's relatives has heard about their survival and has come to find them. They both leave for an undefined destination, far away where no one knows their identity. Eventually they reach the town of Bure, where despite his

---

[200] Interestingly, most of the folk songs in the novel are sung by Gebru. The songs are Oromo *geerarsa* songs, presented in Afan Oromo, but there are no other clues that Gebru speaks Afan Oromo. See Ch. 4.

[201] 'If the owners of those houses are the Shinasha, the Amhara or the Agaw, it is not safer than the people from which they are running as all these people want to kill them for the cultural purpose' (*'Abbootiin maneen uummata Shinaashaa, Amaaraa yokaan Agawa taanaan namoota isaan irraa dheessaa jiran irraa addaa miti. Isaan kunis faachaaf isaan barbaadu', GA,* 55*)*.

multilingual skills—he speaks Afan Oromo apart from Gumuz—Teto encounters alienation and hostility because he cannot speak Amharic:

> Far from finding someone to give them information about this new place they had arrived at, they could not find anyone who understood the language they spoke. Teto tried speaking to them in Afan Oromo and in Gumuz. Everybody stared at him and passed him by without responding. Others frowned and looked down on him and marched off away as if insulted. The only language [the people in this town] spoke was Amharic. Teto thought that this area must be very far away from their land.[202]

Eventually they meet a Gumuz man, Banzi Danyo, who takes them home to his village, Luquma. There Teto gradually starts a romance with Banzi's daughter Yenchen. This leads him to violate several Gumuz cultural norms, and Teto's lack of respect for the norms of Gumuz culture proves not his own but also his sister's undoing. Such violations include shaking Yenche's hand while she is in menstrual isolation and romancing her though she is already betrothed to another man, Saso. As their relationship grows, one day Teto sleeps with Yenche. He then attempts to force his sister Doca to marry Yenche's brother Danbe in exchange, as required by Gumuz culture. Doca, however, kills herself. Teto has then to work hard to pay the bride-price required to marry Yenche without an exchange, for he has no other sister. Banzi, who wants his son Danbe to get a wife through a similar exchange, declines Teto's offer. Left without options, Teto secretly kills Danbe, believing that Banzi will now agree to the marriage. To his dismay, Banzi refuses, even though he does not know that it is Teto who killed his son. Yenche ends up marrying Saso, but is tormented by him for having slept with Teto, who is required to pay Saso for the deed. When Saso later learns that

---

[202] *'Nama waa'ee naannoo sanaa itti odeessu haa hafuu nama afaan isaan beekan dubbatu illee argachuu hindandeenye. Afaan Gumuziitiin afaan Oromootiinis itti dubbachuu yaalee ture Teetoon. Hundinuu akka fira loonii ija itti baasaa dabru maleeke jecha tokko illee deebiseef hinturre. Kaan immoo, yeroo inni itti dubbatu, akka nama arrabsamee fuula guduunfanii, ijaan ajjeesanii bira taru. Afaan isaan dubbatan afaan Amaaraa qofa. Teetoon,'naannoon kun biyya keenya irraa fagoo tahuu qaba,' jedhee yaade'* (*GA*, 67).

Yenche has conceived a child from Teto, he is enraged and beats her to death. Afterwards Teto refuses to pay him.

Teto's troubles do not end there. A friend of Yenche's who is engaged to Teto's friend Bagundo, falls in love with him. When Bagundo, who is the only one to know of Teto's murder but has not betrayed him, discovers that his fiancée is meeting Teto in secret, he threatens to expose Teto unless he leaves the village. Teto runs away without taking his property, and when he comes back to take it, Bagundo's fiancée again meets him in secret, only to be discovered by Bagundo. Teto then quickly leaves, joined by Yenche, who has decided to run away with him. The novel ends tragically when Yenche's husband shoots and kills Teto.

The novel's title, which means 'The Black Man of Abbaya' in Afan Oromo, refers to Abbaya, the river flowing through Gumuz territory, and to the skin colour of the Gumuz people. 'The black man' refers specifically to Teto—the word *gurraacha* in Afan Oromo is masculine. The title is directly taken from the words of a minor Amhara character, Ayalnesh, who hosts Teto at her home after he runs away from Luquma because of his cultural transgressions. It is Ayalnesh who addresses Teto as *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, literally 'the black man who came from around the river Abbaya'. Though the expression is specifically used to address Teto in this context, it extends to all the Gumuz as 'the black people who live around the river Abbaya'. While the Gumuz racially characterize Ethiopian highlanders, particularly the Amhara, as '*diimaa*, 'the red people', on their part the Amhara call the Gumuz '*Sanqalla*' or '*Shanqilla*', an Amharic term with pejorative connotations indicating 'black people'(221).

Gurraacha Abbayaa presents a different small-scale multilingualism from that depicted in *Evangadi*. In the small-scale society depicted in this novel, only two characters are multilingual, Gebru, who speaks Gumuz as well as Amharic, and Teto, who speaks

Afan Oromo as well as Gumuz.[203] Apart from the paratexts, textual traces of Gumuz range from a single word to a stanza of a poem, usually followed by a translation into Afan Oromo. Every time Gumuz characters talk to each other, for example when Bacangire plays with his daughter Doca, when Teto and Doca talk, when Teto talks with Embo, Yenche, or other girls, we find at least a single Gumuz word. All the words, phrases, and sentences in Gumuz are followed by direct translations in Afan Oromo, and some are explained in the glossary. This pervasive presence of Gumuz is enhanced in scenes that evoke cultural practices, as was the case for *Evangadi*. For example, when Teto is wandering in the bush, as he approaches a large number of Gumuz people working in a farm he hears a Gumuz work song, which is presented in the Gumuz language, with a one-line translation in Afan Oromo ('your brother is as strong as iron'):

Maatiyaa dumaatsiyaa qomsisaa
Eesaalkee maanjaa lumbaa
Hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo
Hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo….(12).

The translational mimetic strategy here is selective reproduction followed by direct translation. A song Yenche sings on the day of her wedding and her father's blessings are both quoted in Gumuz. Yenche sings: '*Gimiyuu chakalcha bagaaraa wakesaalee wagandeebaa puquyawaa hincha qiyaajana*… (Oh mother who gave birth to me, I am leaving for another land for you disliked me. Let you give birth to an elephant)' (*GA*,141). After the singing ceremony ends, Yenche and her would-be husband stand in front of Yenche's father, who blesses them: *'Hara wusiika berka washe mabayaa bera bisuwaka berta tufiga yaaketokona. Mona aduga aguyinzamaa, mona aduga gufuma!'* ('Here I give you my daughter. Now I spit malt upon you. Let a son come first and a daughter

[203] Teto's dialogues are occasionally reproduced in Gumuz (and then translated into Afan Oromo); e.g., when he shouts to his father: '*Baabuu! ... Baabuu! ... Feresi! ... Feresi! ...Wayaam! ... Wayaam!'* (5).

follow').[204] Such extensive use of Gumuz here shows a desire for cultural accuracy and respect.

In conclusion, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* differs from all other novels discussed in this thesis for its lack of theoretical discussion on language politics, language ideology, or multilingual practices. Whatever multilingualism is there in the novel (Gebru speaking Gumuz, Teto speaking Afan Oromo) is presented without discussion, as part of everyday coexistence.[205] Within the small-scale society depicted in the novel, multilingual skills operate at a liminal and personalised level. This novel is unique among Oromo novels in its linguistic focus on a minor language without a history of political relationship with Afan Oromo. The novel does show Gumuz characters speaking Afan Oromo rather than Amharic, and such preference, as well as the textual mix between Gumuz and Afan Oromo, can be interpreted as a sign of the peaceful coexistence between the Gumuz and Oromo until recent times.

Conclusion

Reading together Amharic and Afan Oromo novels within a genre (historical novels, village novels) and across genres (historical and village novels) from the perspective of language, and particularly of multilingualism, reveals interesting similarities and dissimilarities in their engagement with language ideologies, multilingual practices, and the politics that underpins them.

First, from the perspective of narrative and textual strategies, all the novels show possible ways to cross over the monolingual 'red lines' such as script homogenization,

---

[204] In Oromo: '*Anis kunoo siif kenneera. Kunoo amma immoo biqila sitti tufeera. Ilmi dursee haa dhufu. Ilma irratti immoo intalli haa dhuftu,' jedhee eebbise'* (*GA*,142). The two quotes are presented through as part of direct speech and textually signalled through as italics, indentation and double quotation.

[205] For example, the character of Gonfa Ganna appears Oromo because of his Oromo name but trades among the Gumuz without any communication problems (*GA*, 160).

absence of translation and monolingual character-system in order to represent multilingual realities. Such a commonality opens up the possibility of creating connections between Amharic and Afan Oromo novels that belong to different, indeed antagonistic, language and literary fields. Second, the novels show the impracticality and danger of linguistic and literary homogenization and highlight the presence of multilingual realities. In other words, though from different political perspectives, they expose the colonialist agenda behind the Ethiopianist metanarrative aimed at erasing multiple linguistic identities in its promotion of the Amhara linguistic and cultural supremacy.

Third, reading together of the historical novels, *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*, highlights competing perspectives about language politics: it presents both the Ethiopianist narratives as expressed by pro-Amhara characters who promote the exclusive supremacy of Amharic over the other languages, and the views of ethno-nationalist characters who combat the assimilationist repression and seeking recognition for their linguistic identity without necessarily vying for domination. The novels textually represent these views through the use of bi-script, different forms of in text-translations and several narrative strategies. Hence, the presence of different scripts in the novels can serve different purposes based on the positionality of the novels in their different linguistic traditions and literary fields. In the Amharic novels, it indicates resistance, while in Afan Oromo it shows Amhara linguistic domination. The novels employ different strategies of mimetic translation, including selective reproduction, verbal transposition, conceptual reflection and explicit attribution (Sternberg 1981:232).

By redefining the spatial imagination of mainstream Ethiopian historiography, historical novels open up multiple multilingual locals that, in turn, shed lights on the implementation and limits of the official monolingual policies. Though uncommon in the Amharic literary tradition, the novels discussed in this chapter show Amhara and Eritrean characters learning dominated languages like Afan Oromo either for the sake

of political alliance (between Oromo and Eritrean liberation fighters) or for the sake of communication with the local community.

Specific multilingual locals provide us with productive cases of reading together. Let me take the town of Naqamte in the Wallaga region of western Ethiopia as one example. In the Oromo novel *Yoomi Laataa?*, Naqamte is where resistance to the imposition of Amharic monolingualism occurs. Here Eliyas violates the monolingual classroom rules by greeting his pupils in Afan Oromo, here cultural troupes come to perform, and Sandaba and Eliyas establish the Wallaga Cultural Troupe, which find enthusiastic welcome among the local Oromo community during the Derg era. In the Amharic novel *Yeburqa Zimita*, Naqamte is where Hawani puts forward the multilingual vision of the federalist forces, a policy at a public conference organized by the EPRDF in the early 1990s, a few months before they defeated the Derg. As we have seen, Hawani's report criticizes the monolingual policy of the Haile Selassie and Derg regimes and suggests multilingual alternatives both at country and regional levels. When read together with *Yoomi Laataa?*, this is a dialogic response to Naqamte's continued resistance to the monolingual policy.

Reading the two novels together also shows the divergence between them. The Hararge multilingual local in *Yoomi Laataa?* differs from multilingual locals in *Yeburqa Zimita* in showing Amhara landlords learning Afan Oromo, even though they down look the people and their language, and for Getaw's father, Mindaysil learning Oromo language threatens the higher status of the Amhara children. Contextualist narratology leads us to the language history, and suggests that until Emperor Haile Selassie's restrictive decree of 1941, the Hararge Oromo were not blocked from using their language in daily life. The long-term negative influence of Haile Selassie's monolingual decree is reflected in the insulting term that the Amhara landlord in Ambo uses for Afan Oromo in *Yoomi Laataa?* when protesting at the Derg's land reform. Finally, the multilingual local of Khartoum of Oromo and Eritrean exiles demonstrates what a free multilingual local

could be, where people just learn each other's languages for the sake of communication. Linguistically speaking, *Yoomi Laataa?* presents richer multilingual locals and more diverse language ideologies than *Yeburqa Zimita*, but the latter engages more consistently with controversial policy issues such as script, as the example with which I began this chapter showed.

By comparison, the village novels introduced in this chapter diverge significantly from the historical novels both thematically and narratively. They present another, equally neglected, aspect of multilingual practices in Ethiopia, that is, multilingualism outside the scope of the official monolingualism. This small-scale multilingualism characterizes, in both *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, people with very limited literacy and who have limited contact with neighboring ethnolinguistic groups is limited: people interact at local markets or to share resources like grassing lands and water for their cattle. Where the contact is more of alliance, say for the sake of protection from stronger groups, as in the case of the Kuyegu in *Evangadi*, people of the minor or smaller group tend to learn the language of the stronger group. The difference from policy-driven, normative multilingualism is that the resulting multilingualism is additive, with the minority group still free to use their own language, unlike *Yeburqa Zimita* where non-Amharic speakers are forced to speak Amharic only. As a result, the village novels rarely show instances of language conflict in small-scale societies. In fact, village novels show a more accommodative relationship between the speakers of politically prestigious and minority languages.

Both *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* feature Amhara characters who learn the languages of the group with which they come into contact. In *Evangadi*, speakers of powerful language such as English (Karlet) and Amharic (Anteneh) learn the language of minority people in which they immerse out of their strong professional and personal interests. In *Gurraacha Abbayaa,* Gebru, who looks down on the Gumuz but learns and speaks Gumuz since there is nothing forcing the Gumuz to learn Amharic. In short, the

village novels present multilingualism both at individual and community levels as a means of social interaction and alliance, of survival or of protection. Language as well as multilingualism are not markers of political identity.

The representation of the multilingual practices at the diegetic and extradiegetic levels is similar in both novels, but there are differences in their strategies of translational mimesis. The language of *Evangadi* is less close to its characters and the extradiegetic narrator manipulates the autonomous presence of the characters. In this regard, *Evagandi* shares the homogenizing conventions of most Amharic novels and the textual standards of the Amharic canon. *Gurraacha Abbayaa* is multilingual at the paratextual as well as textual levels, foregrounding the language of the Gumuz characters with many quotations, making the linguistic representation at the diegetic level is more prominent than in *Evangadi*.

Reading together the novels written in the same language but in different genres in terms of their linguistic and literary positionality presents different views of multilingualism. The Amharic novels *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Evangadi* both challenge Amharic monolingualism through their spatial imagination and through characters who are alive to and aware of their linguistic identities. Though *Evangadi* highlights multilingualism within the framework of national(ist) Ethiopian multilingualism, both novels reflect on major tenets of the Amharic monolingualism such as script homogenization, and instead of the homogenizing conventions employed by mainstream Amharic novels that efface linguistic diversity, they include terms, phrases and direct speech in languages other than Amharic and mix scripts in ways that highlight the presence of other languages.

Of the two novels in Afan Oromo, *Yoomi Laataa?* uses characterization to thematize the negative impact of Amhara monolingualism. By contrast, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* presents a small-scale society with strong cultural norms which has hardly been touched by Amhara monolingualism and uses direct speech representation and translational

mimesis to represent the world of its Gumuz characters. Both novels resist the monolingual Oromo response to Amharic monolingualism and show multilingual locals at work where Amharic monolingualism is weak.

In conclusion, this chapter expands Giffard-Foret's (2013:13) suggestion that before we introduce multilingualism we need to deal with 'the hegemonic position' of the dominant language. The contextual and multilingual approach I develop in this thesis shows the convergences and divergences among the novels in terms of genre and language, as I have shown so far. Reading the novels together from the perspective of literary multilingualism shows the dialogic relations among them despite generic differences and the politically strained relationship between the languages. Such dialogic reading makes it possible to create connections between Amharic and Afan Oromo texts. In turn, these help us think beyond the centre-periphery dichotomy. Furthermore, the co-constitution of multiple perspectives in the connected narratives, the interaction between multilingual characters who are still conscious of their linguistic identities, and the traces of the embedded languages in the texts help open up a space of dialogue about how to overcome the problematic stance entrenched in Ethiopian literary studies, that is the fear of multilingual identities as threats to national unity.

An Amharic novel like *Yeburqa Zimita,* which mixes the dominant national language with marginalized languages, can have significant impact upon (monolingual) speakers of the national language and (multilingual) speakers of marginalized languages. It reminds monolingual readers that they are reading the minds of people other than their own community and bring to their attention the presence of marginalized languages and experiences of their speakers. And it assures multilingual readers of marginalized languages that their experiences are being made accessible to monolingual readers of the privileged language, though they may find it a shocking experience, as has been the case with *Yeburqa Zimita*. This idea chimes with the concept of 'confirmation' introduced by Martin Buber, whom Mikhail Bakhtin admired. According to Buber:

> Confirmation is interhuman, but it is not simply social or interpersonal. Unless one is confirmed in one's uniqueness as the person one can become, one is only seemingly confirmed. The confirmation of the other must include an actual experiencing of the other side of the relationship so that one can imagine quite concretely what another is feeling, thinking, perceiving, and knowing. This 'inclusion,' or 'imagining the real,' does not abolish the basic distance between oneself and the other. It is rather a bold swinging over into the life of the person one confronts, through which alone I can make her present in her wholeness, unity, and uniqueness (quoted in Friedman 2001:26).

Such human qualities, particularly in marginalized people, are often effaced in monolingual texts in dominant languages. Multilingual novels such as *Yeburqa Zimita*, *Yoomi Laataa?*, *Evangadi,* and *Gurrachaa Abbaayaa* create narrative space for the marginalized people in Ethiopia, whose voices and experiences have been overlooked both by state historiography and by creative writings in the national language. This, as Buber argues, has strong implications for silenced voices because it recognizes them, at least narratively, as independent human beings. As Franz Fanon (1987) once asserted, 'to speak is to exist absolutely for the other', and letting marginalized people speak in their languages and through characters drawn from their world is to recognize the existence of the marginalized in their own world. As Maria Boletsi argues (2014:161), multilingual novels promote 'a poly lingual paradigm in the form of a hybrid language that accommodates differences without suppressing it.' From this discussion, we can conclude that, unlike mainstream Amharic writers who have only Amharic readers in mind, these Amharic and Afan Oromo historical and village novels show that the authors have in mind the multilingual readers of the many indigenous languages historically present in Ethiopia.

Chapter 4
'Novelized orature' in historical and village novels

መንግስቱ ሲዳከም ሲታየው ድቀት፡
አይሉት ሰላምታ አይሉት ናፍቆት
ይነስንስ ጀመር ብጣስ ወረቀት።
ደብዳቤስ ለመጻፍ የኔም ልብ ይመኛል
ታዲያ ወረቀቱን ማን ያደርስልኛል ?
አትጨነቅ ደርጉ አይሸበር ሆድህ
አትርጭ ወረቀትህን በወዲያ በወዲህ
እጅን የሚያወጣ እጅ ነው እንግዲህ
ኢህአዴግ ላይተዉህ እኛም ላንሰድህ
(YZ, 250).

When Mengistu feels exhausted
and realizes his downfall,
We do not know whether it is only simple greeting,
or an expression of great love,
He drops **fliers** to us from the sky.
I would love to ***write a response letter***,
but who could deliver my ***letter*** to its destination?
Oh, Derg do not panic or feel distressed,
do not dispatch your ***papers*** here and there.
Only your military might saves you,
the EPRDF will never spare you,
nor shall we ever support you (emphasis added).

This poem appears in *Yeburqa Zimita* as part of the narrative of the defeat of Mengistu's government by the liberation fighters in northern Ethiopia. The narrator tells us that the Amhara farmers chanted the poem in the late 1980s in response to a call for help by President Mengistu Hailemariam among the Amhara people in his war against the liberation fighters, in which fliers were dropped from an aircraft all over the region. The message on the fliers, according to the narrator, sought to play off the Amhara against the Tigrayans by presenting the latter as the traitors who were fighting for the disintegration of the country. But the Amhara farmers were aware of the politics behind the call and responded with this poem, in which they refused to help, realizing that the government is about to collapse. The poem makes three major points about Mengistu's government during the civil war in the late 1980s: its deterioration and final attempt to win support among the people (lines 1-4); the people's inability to express their views in a system of top-down communication (lines 5-6); and finally the fall of the Derg due to

the lack of support from the people (line 12) and the military strength of the EPRDF. The narrator adds that the practice of using poetry for serious socio-political issues was common among the Amhara community. This oral poem highlights the authenticity of the historical event narrated, and the relevance of the 'novelized orature', the concept I explain below, in novel writing in Ethiopian languages.[206]

The poem introduces my core concerns in this chapter through its form— oral verse—and its content, which is political and historical. It highlights the function of orature as organizing principle as it presents the theme of war—the challenges the Derg faced, the public's view, and the military as the only solution to end the dictatorship. In its form, content, and extradiegetic, historical context, it also explicitly highlights practices of writing among the Amhara rural community. The poem's references to chirographic and printed writing (*fliers, writing a response letter, letter* and *papers*) indicate that the singer is literate; yet the poem is chanted. In other words, the poem was born from a marriage between writing practices and oral context in the rural world of the farmers, so that when the singers respond to the event, they are unable to avoid the presence of these written elements (the fliers, the letter).

The presence of this oral poem in the novel signals the interrelationship between the novel and orature and the role of the novel as a mediatory genre between them. It introduces us to the main concern of this chapter, which explores the functions of orature in Amharic and Oromo novelistic narratives, the novels' opening to oral traditions, and the narrative strategies used to represent them—why and how orature included in the four novels and the ideological and narrative implications of the novel's engagement with orature. As I show in my discussion, orature plays a thematic role in the four novels: it acts as an organizing principle and a mobilizing force, embodies

[206] I took the concept of novelization from Laachir (2019) and contextualized in my context as presented throughout this chapter.

historical and cultural memories, voices social assertion and critique, and highlights the richness of a language's cultural heritage. Orature also shapes formal narrative elements and enriches the aesthetic texture and linguistic representation in the novels. Reading together the novels reveals how genre rather than linguistic and literary background influences the representation of orature. Historical novels use orature to evoke historical memories and show popular reactions to political events, whereas village novels incorporate orature to reflect a variety of socio-cultural practices.

4.1 The literature-orature debate

In focusing on orature, this chapter seeks to expand the remit of Ethiopian literature by narrowing/blurring the divide between orature and literature. The mutual influence between literature and orature in Ethiopia has not received significant attention, and to my knowledge, there has been no attempt to explore it, either through academic studies or in institutional terms. Although Ethiopia has a long history of writing in Geez since the first century CE (Gerard 1971), written literary production has not been as popular as oral literature, as in many other parts of Africa.[207] Yet mainstream Ethiopian literary studies celebrates the written traditions in Geez and Amharic and to present oral traditions as inferior, especially those in other languages.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, the syllabi of the survey courses on Ethiopian Literature offered by the Ethiopian universities devote a disproportionate attention to the Amharic literary tradition. This creates a bias against literatures in Ethiopian languages with a recent history of writing. As for advanced degrees, orature and literature are studied separately in different departments, units and programmes. Orature is mostly confined to folklore departments, while written literature is studied in

[207] Crummey (2006) shows that even though writing has been practised by the Christian community, it is has not replaced orality.

literature departments. Many of the theses on orature in Ethiopia have mostly focused on anthropological and sociological aspects rather than literary and formal elements.[208] The implication is that orature is not literary enough. This disciplinary divide reproduces the bias that the 'Amharas and Tigrayans have a *history*, whereas other [Ethiopian] peoples have only an anthropology' (Clapham 2002:40). However, as I show in my comparative study of village novels and historical novels in this chapter, orature is very much present in written literature, including the mostly celebrated genre of modern print culture, the novel.

The privileging of writing over orality and, in the same vein, of literature over orature in Ethiopian history and literary studies is an example of the evolutionist approach of scholars like Jack Goody (1987) and Walter Ong (2002), which traces a 'linear progression' from orality to writing, with the implication that as a society progresses the latter supersedes the former. Writing is considered a marker of modernity, and, by extension, literature is treated as more advanced and sophisticated than orature. This privileging of literature over orature has been rejected by the so-called 'integrationist' scholars, including Ruth Finnegan (1973), who argues that literature and orature are inseparable and mutually non-exclusive. For these scholars, in the words of Merolla (2014), 'oral genres continued to be created in literate societies, and […] structures of oral literature survived in written literature' (p.81). The integrationists' purpose is to shift 'the focus from dichotomies to a cognitive continuum where orality and literacy share several qualities' (p.82). For Finnegan (1992, 2005), the artistic complexity of orature equals that of literature. According to Kaschula (1997), '[o]ral and written literature are literature in their own right— interacting at some point, remaining

[208] The research works like PhD thesis on literatures in Ethiopian languages, particularly that involve orature tend to emphasize the content and themes with political and ideological overtones. These include works by Addisu (1990, 1999); Abraham (2007); Asafa (2003); Assefa (2018); Endalkachew (2017); Wako (2010); Assefa (2015); Anteneh (2014).

autonomous in many ways, backed by the same culture and society, and performing the same function of commenting on that society and the world in general' (p.174). And 'in terms of the aims and functions of literature, there is little difference between them, and they are both fuelled and moulded by the culture that underlines them' (p.186).

In order to resolve the unproductive binary between orature and literature, some scholars have tried to redefine and reconceptualize 'literature' itself. Others have argued that the concept 'oral literature' is inhibiting and does not effectively capture the true characteristics of oral imaginative thinking. Ong (2002) has spoken about the difficulty in finding a generic term that '[includes] both purely oral art and literature' (p. 13).[209] Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu (1998) was the first to introduce the concept of 'orature' (which he used interchangeably with 'oral literature') in order to stress the literary aspect of orally-produced imaginative expressions. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2007) has further promoted the notion of 'orature', which he defines as 'more than the fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life. It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit' (quoted in Ngugi 2007:5). As such, orature for Ngugi is characterized by genre 'fluidity' and 'performance':

> [a] focus on performance brings out the obvious: that much of our relationship to reality, even to the everyday, is negotiated through performance. The invisible is often made visible through performance. It is in the light of the all-pervasive presence of performance that I want to look at orature; a term that may help shed light on a whole lot of other arts and systems of artistic thought (Ngugi 2007:4).

In this chapter, I shall employ the concept of 'orature' in Ngugi's sense. Accordingly, I

[209] Finnegan (2005) also wrestled with the problems related to the definition of literature: 'I suggest that we should envisage it not as definable by reference to Western written genres, but as an umbrella notion that can embrace all those displayed forms and events in which verbal artistry in some way plays a significant part' (p.180).

understand orature as forms of orally performed and enacted imaginative expression mostly marked by the actual or imagined presence of an audience. These forms range from short witty expressions such as proverbs to longer genres such as oral narratives (myths, legends, tales, and fables), oral poetry and folksong. Conversely, 'literature' refers to originally written forms of imaginative expression.

We can trace a network of mutual influence and exchanges between written and oral genres. Though some scholars have still reservations, others have argued for the central role of oral traditions in African imaginative thinking. According to Abiola Irele (1990), for example, 'the African imagination is represented by the body of literature produced by, within, and for the traditional societies and indigenous cultures of Africa. This literature forms an essential part of what is generally considered the oral tradition in Africa' (53).[210] In other words, people who have not developed a writing system can vehicle their imagination, culture, aspiration, frustration, history and memory through oral imaginative expressions. The village novels, *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* exemplify such characteristics, as we shall see. In Ethiopia, the supposedly most 'advanced' literary genre, the novel, is highly dependent on orature, undermining the idea of a 'linear progression' from orature to literature. In fact, the capacity of the novel to accommodate assorted genres of orature and literature makes the novel, among all other genres of imaginative writing, a playground where oral and written traditions can productively interact.[211]

---

[210] 'We recognise in the oral literature a fundamental and indeed 'organic' aspect of the African imagination. For all their undoubted diversity, the manifestations of the imagination in our traditional societies have one common denominator they rely primarily on an oral mode of realisation'; (Irele 2009:54).

[211] Most novels draw – with varying degree of emphasis – on what narratologists call 'speech representation' strategies (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, Monika Fludernik 2009), which included speech report and direct discourse. Speech report 'presents the words of another person in summarized form. Here, the nature of the utterance, the kind of words uttered and the overall topic are the focus of attention. The

The oral characteristics of narrative and the novelistic use of forms of orature like poems, songs and tales can be analyzed at two levels, 'textual' and 'extra-textual', Isidore Okpewho (1992) suggests.[212] At the textual level, the oral characteristics of orature can be represented in a novel through 'the ways in which the words are organized' and the phonic and rhythmic resources in words 'that ensure the effectiveness of the oral performance.' Such stylistic qualities of orature include 'repetition', 'parallelism', 'piling and association', 'tonality', 'ideophones', 'digression', 'imagery', 'allusion' and 'symbolism', 'aspects that make oral literature as an art form somewhat distinct from written literature' (Okpewho 1992:70). Among these characteristics, repetition, parallelism, ideophones, digression, and symbolism are largely present in the novels under discussion, as I will show. At the same time, different forms of orature are trimmed to accord with the narrative purpose, so that they differ from those we find outside the novelistic narratives.

Emmanuel Obiechina (1992) uses the concept of 'narrative proverbs' for oral stories embedded in novels, in order to foreground the strong functions they perform in the novels. He defines narrative proverbs as 'autonomous stories that appear in different genres and narrative registers within different structural linguistic plans and are embedded inside larger, more inclusive narratives. *They function as images, metaphors, and symbols and advance the meanings and formal qualities of the narratives in which they occur'* (p.200, emphasis mine). For example, as we have seen the stories of Burqa's silence and Burqa's prophecy in *Yeburqa Zimita* play a structural function, which makes them the integral part of the main plot. Obiechina uses this concept only for embedded stories and not for poetic inserts such as folksongs and poems, which appear regularly

---

exact propositions that make up the original are not reproduced word for word' (Fludernik 2009:66). Direct discourse is 'a quotation of monologue or a dialogue' (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:111).

[212] What Okpewho calls here 'extra-textual' can be designated as 'extradiegetic commentary' in narratological terminology.

in African novels. However, as I show in my subsequent discussion, poetic inserts play similar roles to embedded stories. For example, the *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?* plays a similar structural role to the stories in *Yeburqa Zimita*.

Obiechina's use of the terms 'narrative' and 'proverbs' is too generic or misleading, as far as my focus on novelized orature is concerned. His notion of 'narrative' is broad and includes narratives other than the novel. In a similar fashion, his use of 'proverb' may be confused with proverb proper, i.e., short, gnomic expressions. For these reasons, instead of Obiechina's expression I use the term 'novelized orature' to designate different forms of orature, tales/ stories, songs and poetry, included in the novels as part of their narration. Novelized orature is different from orature proper in that it is reworked, appropriated, or dialogized, to use Bakhtin's term, so as to serve a variety of narrative purposes in the novel.

This chapter generally reads 'novelized orature' in the novels as a form of literary resistance against the chirographic or script-centred literary tradition of the Great Tradition. Within this realm, the chapter argues, first, that novelized orature fulfills thematic, aesthetic and formal functions. For example, in the selected historical and village novels presented in this chapter, as already mentioned, orature is used specifically to organize themes, express assertion and critique of social practices, invoke historical memories, reflect one's cultural treasure, and mobilize a group towards a common goal. In all these ways, novelized orature enriches, enhances and shapes the form and the content of the novels, localizing or domesticating the novel genre to specific socio-cultural and political contexts. These functions showcase the verbal artistry of orature or present orature as literary imaginative expression in its own right.

My second argument in this chapter is that the novel, and particularly the dialogic novel, is a mediatory genre where a variety of literary genres are woven together for different narrative effects. Direct speech representation, characterization, narratorial

commentary and literary multilingualism (that is introducing elements of orature in their original languages) are all used to represent different types of orature as part of its novelistic narratives. My Third argument is that these novels employ 'narrative interfacing', that is, they actively foreground the interplay or interaction between orature and literature in order to contest the binary relation between orature and literature that still promoted by the contemporary scholars, including theorists of world literature such as Pascale Casanova (2004), David Damrosch (2003) and Franco Moretti (2000, 2005).

Finally, reading together the novels' engagement with orature along the lines of genre and of the linguistics and literary traditions in which the novels are positioned shows that orature is shaped by the linguistic and literary traditions and the genre to which a novel belongs. This understanding of orature and/in the novel supplements the idea that orature is an independent literary imaginative expression in its own right and not just an antecedent to literature. Both orature and the novel mutually influence each other: just as novels novelize orature, orature also localizes the novels. The chapter is divided into three sections. It first presents the functions of the novelized orature, and the narrative techniques used by the novels to represent different types of orature. It then focuses on the interrelationship between orature and the novel. Lastly, it highlights what reading the novels together reveals.

4.2 The functions and representations of novelized orature in historical and village novels

Novels incorporate orature for thematic, aesthetic, and formal purposes; in turn, orature can have a far-reaching impact on the novels. Orature 'localizes' the novel, i.e., roots it in a certain locality and specific sociocultural and political contexts, but to view it as 'local colour' would be reductive. In other cases, novelized orature contests the monologic or monolingual hegemonic narratives like the Ethiopian Great Tradition. As Bakhtin (1981, 1984) argues through his concept of 'heteroglossia', the novel inherently resists the homogenization and monologization of experiences, stories, trajectories, voices and languages. In the context of this study, orature is an example of heteroglossia, and this presents a strong theoretical foundation for the interplay between orature and the novel. Eileen Julien (1992, 1995), Fiona Moolla (2012) and Olankunle George (2009) have all argued that the presence of orature in the novel is not only for 'ornamental' purposes, but is also an 'analytical category' in the study of the African novel.[213] Finally, by incorporating orature in substantial ways novels unsettle the hierarchical relationship between oral and (written) imaginative expressions. The 'novelization' of orature posits an 'ongoing relationship of coevalness and simultaneity' (George 2009:17) between the novel and orature, blurring the divide and hierarchical relationship between the two.

In the four novels discussed in this chapter not only highlight and make space for multilingualism (see Ch. 3) but also use orature as a living force, crucial to the creation

[213] In her study of Nuruddin Farah's novels, Fiona Moolla (2012) finds 'a strong oral element in the novel in its reliance on alliteration, imagery, and symbols common to oral verse as well as in its use of folk tales' (p.455). In a similar fashion, B.W. Andrzejewski (2011) points out that poetic inserts in one Somali novel are used for 'foregrounding, that is, enhancing the relevance of and attracting attention to particular aspects or themes' (98). Obiechina (1992), argues that the folk tales in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) are used for 'diverse formal, thematic and aesthetic purposes' and specifically contribute to our understanding of the novel by offering us 'some insight to clarify the action, to sharpen characterization, to elaborate themes and enrich the setting and environment of action' (p.204).

of new historical memories, to political and group mobilization, to the transmission of cultural values, to social critique, etc. Orature thus mostly plays a thematic rather than formal function. I now turn to these major functions of orature across the four novels. I explain these themes one by one and explain their influence on the form and overall content of the novel.

4.2.1 Novelized orature as an organizing principle

Yeburqa Zimita, *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* use different types of orature as an organizing principle. That is to say, the structure of embedded stories and songs reflects the broader structure of the novel, and historical, political and cultural themes are organized around the main themes presented by these elements of orature. Given that the three novels are positioned in different linguistic and literary traditions and belong to different genres, the way how orature is used in each novel differs from one novel to the other.

Among several examples of novelized orature in *Yeburqa Zimita*, the two stories of Burqa's silence and Burqa's prophecy work as organizing principle of the plot about the Amhara-Oromo conflict in Burqa. At the same time, the narrative context in which these stories are introduced reveals competing perspectives about oral tradition, which are revealed through dialogues between characters. For the Derg representatives, including President Mengistu and his Minister of National Security, oral tradition reflects a lack of civilization, and Oromo orature is a 'nightmare'. When the President asks the minister why the famers are revolting, the minister's explanation reassures the President that the farmers are not political because they have no modern education and no access to modern media and live their own traditional life.

According to the minister, the Burqa Oromo 'refused to be organized under the *kebele*[214] administration. They are **barbarians** who still govern themselves through their **traditional system**' (*YZ* 19). 'In the village of Burqa', he adds, 'there is no educated person. The farmers have no radio. As they have no information about politics outside their world, it is the **nightmare** of the **sorcerers** that made them behave violently' (*YZ* 21, emphasis added). The minister characterizes the Oromo farmers as 'barbarians' on account of their allegiance to their traditional system of life and their refusal of the new administration. Their oral imagination is dubbed a 'nightmare', and their experts in oral traditions are dubbed 'sorcerers'. These remarks imply an understanding that political consciousness and literacy are interrelated — where there is literacy, there is a higher political awareness and politically-induced conflict. By implication, the remarks reveal how indigenous (and predominantly oral) knowledge systems are discredited by Derg officials who are proponents of the Great Tradition.

A second, oppositional view is presented by Anole Waqo, who was born in Burqa and knows more about the Oromo farmers' concerns than the Derg officials. His view is reflected in a dialogue between him and his friend Jibril, in which Anole explains the cause of the conflict. For Anole, oral imagination is a means through which people preserve historical memories and articulate political desires. The two stories about Burqa have strong political implications: as Anole clearly articulates, 'the farmers' revolt is politically induced' by Menelik's forceful occupation of the Oromo lands and the Oromo want the Amhara to leave their lands. Though it is not in a direct confrontation, the second view exposes how mainstream understandings of oral community miss the reality on the ground. Unlike the minister's speculation, Anole explains that the conflict is based on oral stories that Burqa farmers have been rehearsing for about 70 years. Narratively speaking, through the use of dialogism as a

[214] Kebele, in Amharic, is a small administrative unit in Ethiopia instituted during the Derg era.

narrative technique, the author disproves and resists mainstreamist script centric belief and by using oral stories to present a century-old Oromo grievance. While the stories highlight the historical grievance, the song, to which I turn below, mobilizes the community towards immediate action.

Let me introduce and discuss the stories in some detail. As mentioned earlier, the stories are introduced through a dialogue between Anole and Jibril. Anole gives a summary of the story to Jibril, and then the extradiegetic narrator tells the full story, informing us it was originally told by an elder, Waqo, whose interjections I mark in bold:

> This river, during the ancient time of our fathers, used to be known as Burqa. Its source is from this fertile land of Burqa village, and it satisfies the Oromo soil with its water. The Burqa flows along the borders of the Oromo lands. Its water is crystal clean and runs swiftly. The Oromo used to drink from this river, wash their clothes and cook with water from it. When the Oromo felt sick, they used to drink from Burqa and get healed.
> **The story does not stop here! Do you think it stops only here? Of course not!**
> When Burqa runs through Oromo land, it produces a sweet musical sound as it collides with the rocks. When it jumps across the valleys, it teaches the Oromo the art of heroism but sends terror and panic to their enemies. When it slowly flows over the plain, children play with it. And then they ask it to tell them stories. Then the Burqa tells the children stories about the valleys it jumps over, the fields it flows through, the gorges it crosses and the Oromo who live in remote lands.
> **Ah, what could be done?**
> The Oromo land was taken away by the *neftenya's* forces. This event enraged Burqa and it retreated underground like a panther. Burqa vows that until the Oromo fight for their rights and regain their self-respect, it will never come out of the earth's womb. As a consequence, it turns poisonous and sickens a person who tastes it, cuts their entrails and eventually kills them. Thereafter, the people labelled it *Bishaan Seexan* (Devil's water). However, Burqa is ashamed of and saddened by the defeat of the Oromo people and hides itself underground.[215] (emphases added)

---

[215] *ይህ ወንዝ ጥንት በአያቶቻችን ዘመን ስሙ 'ቡርቃ' ተብሎ ይታወቅ ነበር። መነሻውም ከዚህች በልምልላመዋ ከታወቀችው ከቡርቃ መንደር ሲሆን፤ የኦሮሞዎችን መሬት ሁሉ ዉሃ እያጠገበ እያካለለ ይጓዝ ነበር። የቡችቃ ወንዝ በኦሮሞ ምድር ዳርቻዎች ሁሉ ይዞር ነበር። ቡርቃ ፈጣን፤ ዉሃው እንደ ኩለ የጠራ ወንዝ ነበር። ጥንት ኦሮሞዎች ዉሃ የሚጠጡት ከቡርቃ ጨልፈው ነበር። ምግባቸዉንም የሚያበስሉት፤ ልብሳቸውን የሚያጥቡት በቡርቃ ዉሃ ነበር።ኦሮሞዎች ህመም ሲሰማቸዉ ከቡርቃ መጎንጨት ብቻ ይበቃቸዉ ነበር___ይፈወሳሉ።*

መቼ ያ ብቻ ሆኖ?

ቡርቃ የኦሮሞን ምድር እያካለለ ሲጉዋዝ፤ ከአለት ሲጋጭ፤ ድምጹ ሙዝቃ ሆኖ ልብ ያማልላል። ከገደል ሲዘል ድፍረቱ ለኦሮሞዎች ጀግንነትን ሲያስተምች፤ ለጠላቶቻችን ደግሞ ፍችሃትና ሽብርን ይልቅ ነበር። የቡርቃ ወንዝ ለጥ ባለው መስክ ዝግ ብሎ ሲጉዋዝ ደግሞ ህጻናት

The other story, closely related to the story of Burqa's silence, and designated by the narrator as Burqa prophecy:

> Waqo! Waqo! This generation is unable to regain their dignity. My silence also continues. The very day you pass away, the Oromo's anger will re-erupt and make the earth tremble. The youngsters will lead one another and prove their heroism. That day, I will raise my head. The Oromo will enjoy my music. They will learn my heroism. They will inherit it. They will listen to my stories.[216]

Waqo has actually invented both stories. The first is his personal interpretation of the unusual characteristics of Burqa River and its naming. Local people started to call the river the Devil's Water, but Waqo, who knows the background history of the river very well, changes the derogatory name back to its original name, Burqa. The story of Burqa's silence consists of three major sections. The first introduces the river and its connection to the livelihood of the Oromo. The second section becomes metaphorical and plays with the special ways in which the river gives different messages and services to different groups of people. The third section shows Waqo linking the changing orography of the river to figure the historical and political phenomena that he wants his audience to understand.

The second story is a prophecy by Burqa River, which according to Waqo the river told him in a dream. It takes the form of a prophecy about how and when the Oromo will free themselves from Amhara rule. It is a dialogical rejoinder to the defeat that Waqo's generation experienced and articulates how the new generation should overcome this failure and achieve freedom. Narratively, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, these

---

ይንቦጫረቁቤታል።'ቡርቃ ትረት አዉራለን ?' ይሉታል። ስለዘለለው ገደል፣ ስላጥቀለቀዉ ሜዳ፣ ስላቁዋረጥዉ ሸለቆ፣ በሩቅ መንደሮች ስሌሚኖሩት አሮሞዎች ይተርክላቸዋል።

ታዲያ ምን ያደርጋል?

የኦሮሞዎችን ገዛት ነፍጠኛ በጉልበት ወሰደው። በዚህ እጅግ የተናደደው የቡርቃ ወንዝ እንደ ዘንዶ ተምዘግዝጎ፣ አካላቱን ሁሉ ሰብስቦ ከመሬት ስር ተደበቀ። 'ኦሮሞዎች ለነጻነታቸዉ ተጋድለው ክብራቸውን ሳያስጠብቁ ከተድብኩበት ጉሬ አልወጣም ብሎ ከመሬት ማህጸን ገብቶ ተከተተ። ሰዎች ከምንጩ ሲጠጡም ወዲያዉኑ ዉሃዉ መርዝ ሆኖ አንጀታቸውን በጣጥሶ ይገድላቸዋል። በዚህ ምክናት 'የሰይጣን ዉሃ' ተባለ። ቡርቃ ግን በኦሮሞዎች ሽንፈት አፍሮና አዝኖ ነው የተደበቀዉ' እያሉ ነበር ዋቆ አባ ዱላ ለወጣቶቹ ገበሬዎች የሚይያወጉት ። (32፣33)

[216] 'ዋቆ! ዋቆ! የዚህ ዘመን ወጣቶች ክብራችሁን ማስመለስ አቅቶዋቸዋል። የኔም ዝምታ ይቀጥላል። አንተ እድሜህን ጨርሰህ የሞትክ እለት ግን፤ ወጣቶች በወጣች እየተመሩ ጀግንነታቸውን ያስመክራሉ። ያን ጊዜ እኔም አንገቴን ብቅ አደርጋለሁ። ኦሮሞዎች በሙዚቃዬ ይመሰጣሉ። ጀግንነቴን ይማሩታል፤ ይወርሱታል፤ ተረተንም ያዳምጣሉ!' (33)

stories are symbolic representations of Oromo's grievances. When, summoned by the Burqa farmers, Anole asks them not to go to the war, he interprets the story in these terms: 'Burqa means you! It is you who kept silent, not Burqa the river. The prophecy of Burqa River, which flows through the Oromo land, is a parable told for you. Those who were singing were our own fathers! Those who jumped through the valleys were our fathers —not really the Burqa River. Burqa means we ourselves!'.[217] Anole's interpretation reveals that the stories are fictional yet based on true history—the war between the Oromo and Menelik's forces in Arsi—but that the Burqa Oromo should interpret them rather than taking them literally and go to war. According to Anole, the old river Burqa, with its life-enhancing qualities such as jumping, singing and telling stories, stands for the older generation who enjoyed freedom before the coming of Menelik. The current and the abnormal Burqa River, which is bitter and poisonous and hides under the belly of the earth, symbolizes the younger generation which is now preparing for war. Anole's interpretation is effective, and he is able to stop the villagers from rushing into war, at least for the moment.

The novel employs a variety of extradiegetic and (intra)diegetic narrative techniques to present these stories as part of its narrative development (see Ch. 1) while remaining cognizant of their oral characteristics. Understanding them as examples of novelized orature highlights their integral place in the novel, in terms both of content, as I have shown, but also of form. Formally, the two stories work as an organizing principle in this novel through symbolism, metaphor, personification, repetition, and digression. Symbolism is employed to explain historical phenomena through a concrete environmental element, i.e., the poisonousness of Burqa standing for Oromo anger. The personification of the inanimate, popular in orature, foregrounds the relationship

[217] 'ቡርቃ ማለት እናንተ ናቸው! ዝም ያላችሁትም ወንዙ ሳይሆን እናንተ ናችሁ! የኦሮሞን ምድር የሚያጥለቀልቀው የቡርቃ ወንዝ ትንቢት ለእናንተ የተነገረ ምሳሌ ነው! በቡርቃ ወንዝ ተመስለው ይዘምሩ የነበሩት አባቶቻችን ናቸው! ከገደል የዘለሉት አባቶቻችን ናቸው_ ቡርቃ ወንዝ አይደለም። ቡርቃ እኛ ነን።' (83)

between nature and human being. According to Ngugi (2007), orature capitalizes on human interaction with nature, and the two stories do so through personification. *Yeburqa Zimita* presents several contexts when the Oromo in Burqa call upon the Burqa River to forgive them for their inability to fight and free themselves from domination ('Please Burqa have mercy upon us') and stop being silent ('Burqa! Time is ripe', *YZ* 55). In this way the novel demonstrates the potential of orature to represent serious historical and political themes, and its literariness as imaginative expressions.

The novel also uses repetition to foreground the prominence of a theme. Two points are worth considering here. First, the strategy of repeating words and sentences promotes the orality or performativity of the story. For example, the emphatic repetition of Waqo's name at the beginning of the story of Burqa's prophecy is a typical way through which oral storytellers engage their audience. The last three sentences of the story of Burqa's prophecy briefly restate the second section of the story of Burqa's silence, and this repetition creates a link between two stories. The intertextual link, in turn, enhances the dialogic interaction between the two generations—Waqo's and the younger generation. By clearly stating when Burqa's silence will end and the river will fulfil its promise and resume its course, the narrator creates suspense and expectation—are the young people really up to the task? Will they act accordingly? In other words, the story not only mobilizes the Oromo youths for a political goal, but also creates narrative suspense, an example of how orature shapes the form of the novel. Repetition occurs also at the diegetic level, and the story is referred to thirteen times across the novel—sometimes as a historical memory and at other times to enhance topics like the Oromo defeat at the hands of Menelik's forces.

In their shortness and syntactical simplicity, the sentence structure of the stories also reflects common characteristics of oral narratives. Though their sentence structure is not very different from the rest of the novel, the stories sound as if they are being orally told

to an audience. This effect is enhanced by the questions interrupting the story's flow, which hint at the presence of listeners and at Waqo's attempt at engaging them. Other than indicating the presence of an audience, Waqo's two questions fulfil other narrative functions. On the one hand, they add new ideas, as with the metaphorical roles played by the river following the first question. On the other hand, they add emotional tones, like the regret and frustration accompanying the second question. Waqo believes in the power of the stories to influence the younger generation. Storytelling is for him a strategy to shape the worldview of his people and he tells them effectively to win their support for his political goal.

The novel also draws on narratorial commentary, direct speech representation, and characterization in order to retain the oral characteristics of these stories as it novelizes them. First, through narratorial commentary the extradiegetic narrator and intradiegetic narrators, particularly Anole, show us that the stories have been orally narrated and transmitted among the non-literate Oromo community in Burqa.[218] This sense of transmission is further enhanced through the characterization of Anole and Waqo, who represent two different generations. In what is usually called direct characterization, the extradiegetic narrator tells that Waqo is an older and knowledgeable man who narrates accounts of the abuses committed against the Oromo that he witnessed first-hand during and after the war of occupation. Waqo invented the stories of Burqa's silence and of Burqa's prophecy on the basis of his experiences so as to make his war-related narratives more powerful and thereby effectively mobilize the whole community.

[218] The literate extradiegetic narrator distances himself from the stories through the use of the technique of direct speech representation and tells us the stories are told by non-literate Oromo elder, Waqo, and this is textually indicated through the use quotation marks (*YZ* 32-3).

The two stories formally include past and future actions and events, to evoke historical memories and indicate future goals. If Waqo represents the non-literate oral generation, Anole represents the literate and younger generation, and their strong relationship represents the relationship between (Waqo's) oral world and (Anole's) literate world, and by extension between orature and literature. Waqo is open to literacy and, aware that modern education is important for Oromo liberation, pushes Anole to get it. Anole in turn is always grateful and relies on the oral imagination of his adoptive father. The narrator specifies that all the characters narrate these stories from memory. Even Anole, who is literate, does not use written notes when telling the story. In short, given the novel's positionality in the dominant language literary tradition, this novelized orature textually reflects Oromo views through the traces of Afan Oromo that orature introduces.

The Oromo historical novel *Yoomi Laataa?* presents an equally strong case of orature and novel interface than *Yeburqa Zimita.* It not only presents 'fictional orature' but also draws on a distinctive popular Oromo genre of oral poetry, the *geerarsa,* in order to organize narrative themes relating to the marginalization of the Oromo and the oppressive Amhara administration, to evoke historical memories, and to introduce political resistance. The *geerarsa* I quote below, which appears in Chapter 5 of the novel, highlights the grievance of the Oromo people against the Derg government. Contextual narratology is helpful in elucidating the extra-textual context of this *geerarsa*. To recall the narrative and historical context, the chapter deals with the policy reforms of the Derg government and how President Mengistu deceived the people and gradually turned into a dictator. The chapter highlights that the Derg appeared at least theoretically to believe in the ethnic politics, that is, it promised to respect ethnic rights such as multilingualism and multiculturalism. In practice, as the Oromo political elites in the novel, Sandaba and Eliyas, clearly articulate, the Derg never believed in multilingualism and multiculturalism but continued the legacy of Amhara cultural and

political hegemony, in the face of strong opposition by the people (see also Ch. 2 above).[219] Against this background, cultural revivalism as manifested through festivals, entertainments and ceremonies by Oromo cultural troupes acted as a conduit for Oromo nationalism. Studies by Demitu (2016), Ezekiel (2016), Mohammed (2016) and Mollenhauer (2011) have already shown the similar functions of the Oromo music.

The chapter introduces one such cultural festival, which was actually held in 1977 at the National Theatre Hall in Addis Ababa. We learn from the narrator that this is the first such an event in a hundred years of Amhara occupation, since the Oromo were banned from holding such cultural events (*YL* 115). The event was prepared by Oromo nationalist groups based in Addis Ababa with the aim of bringing together Oromo groups living in different parts of Ethiopia. The novel does not tell us clearly what really happened on this cultural event, but rather focuses on the Wallaga Cultural Troupe, whose committee members, who hold different government positions, are supposed to censor the items presented at the events in line with the implicit government policy that discourages works promoting ethnic rights.[220] Yet, the narrator tells us, the songs presented at this event escaped censorship, and the singers were able to expose the oppression of the Oromo by the Derg government. The narrator quotes only two songs presented at the festival. The first is by a real singer, Elfinesh Qano, and the second is a *geerarsa*. Only two lines of Elfinesh's song are quoted, in which she clearly articulates her doubts about the Derg government.

---

[219] One of the Derg's policies presented in the second half section of Chapter Five, was the 1976 'National Democratic Revolution', which was supposed to grant ethnic groups the right to self-determination, despite growing public incredulity directed at Mengistu's promises.

[220] Though Sandaba and Eliyas are members, their power is limited given their political power in the Derg government.

The *geerarsa,* recited by the Wallaga Cultural Troupe (though with no specific reciter mentioned), is quoted directly and in full:

'*geerar geerar*, they say.
What shall I *geeraru*?
I only waver among countless ideas.
The *geraraa* is at *Geeroo*[221]*!*
The one, who is never tired of *geerarsa*,
is in the forest of Naqamte.[222]
What can never be cleaned despite deep washing,
What can never be smoothed despite intense pounding,
is in my stomach.
The hemipteran pricked me,
though the smallest of all animals,
it disguised itself under the ash.
The dwarf abused me,
though still the poorest of all,
but time is on his side.
Our home was once on the opposite side of the river,
but now we are forced to move to the other side.
Our people were great before,
But now they are a coffee pot.
Akaayii[223] is no nutritious food, but we have dined on it for we were starving.
Aqaaqii[224] has no clean water, but we have drunk it for we are thirsty.
We stayed at Aqaaqii, the land of Tufa Gondore[225]
We dined on *akaayii f*or nine days like the sons of a maid.
My bed is rough, but I still sleep on it.
My heart is grieved, but I still ignore it.[226]

---

[221] Geeroo is a name of place in Wallaga according to the narrator
[222] Naqamte forest is where liberation fighters ambushed and fought the Derg.
[223] *Akaayii* in Afan Oromo is roasted cereals.
[224] Aqaaqii is the name of a river. In line 23, it refers to a place.
[225] Tufa Gondore is a person who lived at Aqaaqii and was known for his good administration.
[226] *… geerar geerar naan jedhu*
Maal abbaakoon geerara
Anoo yaadan yeelala
Geeraraan Geeroo jira
Namni geeraree hinquufne
Baddaa Naqamtee jira
Kan dhiqanii hinqullofne
Kan tumanii hinbullofne
Garaa koo keessa jira.

The genre of the *geerarsa* has a special place among the Oromo due to its role as expression of national resistance (Abdullahi and Jaarsoo 1996; Addisu 1999; Asafa 2003; Addisu 1990). In the Oromo literary tradition, the *geerarsa* is mostly recited or chanted, either individually or in a group (Addisu 1990; Asafa 2003).[227] According to Addisu (1990, 1999), the *geerarsa* was transformed from a song of praise into a song of Oromo national resistance.[228]

The *geerarsa* recited by the Wallaga Cultural Troupe presents the political challenges faced by the Oromo under the Derg government. In the first six lines, the singer establishes his own position and acknowledges other more prominent singers who dwell in the forest. These forest dwellers may be a reference to the Oromo liberation

---

Nanyaatte kaa Buujaleen
Gadi baddin bineensaa
Daaraatti hudduu gatattee
Nadhaantekaa quucareen
Gadi badiin hiyyeesaa
Yerootti hudduu gatattee
Manni keenya dur gama
Amma ammo gamanaa
Lammiin keenya dur nama
Amma ammo jabanaa
Akaayiin midhaaniire beelofnaan nyaanne malee
Aqaaqiin bishaaniiree dheebonnaan dhugne malee
Aqaaqii jala bullee biyya Tufaa Gondoree
Akaayiin sagal bulle akka mucaa Xomboree.
Sireenkoo quuqaa qabdii irruman ciisa malee
Garaankoo quuqqaa qabdii ittumaan dhiisa malee (pp.116-7).

[227] According to Asafa (2003), the *geerarsa* is not a genre limited to cataloguing exploits of war, but has great social, historical and political significance (p. 62): 'Formerly, *geerarsa* was a boast song, but presently the Oromo have nothing to boast about'. In Mollenhauer's (2011) study of the Oromo music, one of his interviewees reported that reciting *geerarsa* is a daily routine, and that reciters recount it whenever they deem it appropriate. Other works by Assefa (2018), Baxter (1986), Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene (2004) Nagaso (1983), Sumner (1996), Tamene (1983) and Zelalem (2003) on Oromo oral poetry indicate that the poetry have multiple functions among the Oromo people ranging from hunting activities to serious national politics.

[228] A variant of the above *geerarsa* is popular among the Oromo of western Ethiopia and is permeated with the elements of resistance.

fighters conducting an armed struggle against the Derg government from the 1970s onwards. After expressing his disappointment and deep-rooted grievances about the mistreatment of his people under the Derg government (his empty stomach), the reciter draws on symbolism (lines 10 to16) and presents his oppressor as a small insect, the hemipteran, who is inferior to him but is able to abuse him because of the political situation—a reference to the dictatorial local level Derg officials who abuse the people. The reciter then employs a metaphor to compare his people to a lowly coffee pot (lines 17 to 20). Due to such an inferior status, people are forced to live on less nutritious food like dry and roasted cereals (*akaayii*) and unclean water (lines 21 to 24). The two final lines (25-26) emphatically reiterate his personal discontent (see lines 6 to 9) before expressing his inability to do anything about his conditions. Amhara oppression and Oromo nationalism are among the major themes of the novel, and this content analysis of the *geerarsa* shows that, thematically, the poem shares a great deal with the novel.

The formal elements of the *geerarsa* such as the use of impersonal statements, the shift in pronouns, and repetitions reflect its structural complexity and the distinctive qualities that make the *geerarsa* a sophisticated form of poetic expression. The impersonal statements that compose the *geerarsa* imply the prominence that the reciter bestows on the topic and message of the *geerarsa* rather than on the subject chanting it. It is common public song with defined thematic focus (war and nationalistic themes) among the Oromo. As a matter of fact, Oromo people, especially those from the western part of the Oromia region, still recite this *geerarsa* albeit with slight modifications: the reciters replace, for example, some proper nouns with other names that they think represent the context in which the *geerarsa* is recited.[229]Through the shift in personal pronouns the reciter creates a dialogical connection between the reciter's issues and those facing his

[229] On December 19, 2019, at the MULOSIGE conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a student from Addis Ababa University performed this *geerarsa* with only a few modifications.

people, and is a means by which the reciter engages his audience. The reciter begins by referring to himself, '*geerar geerar* ***naan*** *jedhuu;* ***ani*** *maalan geeraraa*' [They tell **me** to *geerar geerar* /to recite *geerarsa*/; what shall **I** *geeraraa*/recite/?]. Half-way through the *geerarsa* (from line 19 onwards), he shifts to first person plural pronouns, and this helps him to present the collective concerns of his people. And at the end, the reciter returns to the issue that haunts him.

Finally, the reciter also employs formulaic expressions and repetition, which the novel retains to foreground the orality of the *geerarsa*. The expression, '*geerar geerar*' that opens the poem is common among several reciters, and in most cases, as in this context, it works to create a rapport with the audience or introduce the singer. The use of the term *geerarsa*, which denotes recitation or chanting, situates the poem within the *geerarsa* genre. The repetition of this term in the first six lines is an example of narrative representation of the oral quality of *geerarsa*, technically called 'lexical parallelism' (Okpewho, 1992), and used for emphasis and rhythmic effect.

In the two historical novels, *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*, orature is novelized not only to enhance the historicity of a particular period, but also to work as a 'narrative proverb' to advance the meaning of the narrative (Obiechina 1992). By contrast, in *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, the non-political Oromo village novel, orature plays a crucial role in complicating and presenting different views about the tragic incidents. As presented in the foregoing chapters, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* presents a series of conflicts, between Gumuz and Amhara characters and also among Gumuz characters. The two folk songs sung in connection with Gebru's killing of Badija, for example, in this incident, a *dhaaduu* sung by Gebru and a song sung by the Gumuz cattle keepers, are examples of novelized orature and, function as an organizing principle due to their thematic connection with the main topic of the novel, i.e. the rightness of revenge.

Like *Yoomi Laataa?*, *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, introduces a popular Oromo oral genre called *dhaaduu*, a wartime song used to motivate fighters or to celebrate the victory (Kassam 1986; Asafa 2016, 2018). Here, though, it is not sung for political or historical purposes. When Gebru kills Badija while hunting in the forest and returns home with Badija's genitals and limbs as evidence of his killing (see Ch. 3), his Amhara relatives and friends celebrate his achievement for several weeks. The celebration is marked by various boastful songs (*dhaaduu*) sung by Gebru himself and by his friends. The songs comment on Gebru's reckless murder of Badija, and later on his own death at the hand of Badija's brother, Bacangire. Whereas Gebru's heroic/boasting *dhaaduu* celebrates his achievement, a song by the Gumuz cattle keepers' questions and condemns it. The presence of the *dhaaduu* in this novel about the Gumuz community is interesting, and possibly suggests a cross-cultural practice of the *dhaaduu* among the Gumuz. This song, particularly among the Oromo, is performed in situation of serious conflict such as wars, battles, raids, or other military endeavours. In *Gurraacha Abbayaa* it is used to express emotions of pride and values of valour in the context of the feud between Bacangire and Gebru and their families:

Abba Gabruu Tafarraa…[230]
I have gone through the river valley
And have dried the throat
of the black man from Mattin,
whose fame is far reaching.
I have gone through the village of Mattin
and have ruined his jaw.
I have gone through the village of Mattin
and have got rid of my grudge.
Abba Gabruu Tafarraa
My *faacha*[231] is unique on its own

[230] Abbaa Gabru Tafarraa: Father of Gebru, Teferra. It is used as a sign of pride for being the son of Teferra.

[231] *Faacha* is a piece of the human body, either limbs or genitals, usually kept by the killers as proof that they have killed their enemies.

for the hairs around his genitals are curled up,
his teeth are sharp and able to cut raw meat.
He is able to carry *gaayyaa*[232] in his left hand
and able to hold *saayyaa*[233] in his right hand.
I made him jump over a tree log
and made him to stand on his knees,
and made him throw away his gun
And finally made him eat the sand.[234].

This *dhaaduu* presents three main topics: where Gebru goes and how he spoils Badija's body parts and finally kills him (lines 1 to 10); Badija's strength and exceptional qualities (lines 11 to 15); and Badija's collapse (lines 16 to 19). These are all dramatized and orchestrated to exaggerate Gebru's achievement. Throughout the song, Gebru exaggerates Badija's strength and fame in ways that we find no corroboration from the narrator or other characters. Lastly, Gebru adopts an oppositional dialogic form (I and He) and presents himself as homodiegetic narrator. Exaggeration by the singer is a

---

[232] *Gaayyaa* is a traditional tobacco smoked by the Gumuz.
[233] *Saayyaa* is cow.
[234] *… Abbaa Gabruu Tafarraa…*
Gurraacha Mattini kaa
Kan gurri gachii ti kaa
Laga keessan ol sokkee
Foon laagaa isaan goggogsee.
Mattin keessan ol sokkee
Lafee maddiin fottoqsee.
Mattin keessa cecehee
Yaaddoo xiiqii koon bahee.
Abbaa Gabruu Tafarraa…
Faachi koo faacha caalaa,
Isa rifeensi guduruu
Ilkaan foon dheedhii muruu.
Isa bitaan gaayyaa baatu
Mirgaan saayyaa qabatu.
Jirmaan tarkaanfachiisee
Jilban dadhaabachiisee.
Qawwee isaa darbachiisee
Cirraacha qorisiise… (16-7)

common characteristic of the *dhaaduu* according to Aneesa Kassam (1986:199-200), who has studied the genre as sung among the Gabra people of southern Ethiopia:

> [*Dhaaduu*] constitutes a man's personal history, upon which his reputation is built, for it is through his prowess that he is remembered during his own life-time and through which he will leave his mark on the future. […] They are recited at a very rapid pace, thus conveying young man's agitation and anger. In them he usually exaggerates his bravery, and there is a subtle play on words.

Gebru's *dhaaduu* is preceded by narratorial commentary, in which the narrator describes the celebrations in apparently neutral terms; however, the use of the expression 'arouse Gebru's heart' [*onnee Gabruu waan bokoksan fakkaata*] (17) suggests a positive endorsement of the murder: 'It has been a week since the songs had heard from the village of Axaballa.[235] Those unable to attend the celebration due to old age or other personal problems listen to them from their homes. Women's songs, their ululation, young boys' songs, the killer's bragging… all together they *arouse the hearts* of men and women' (*GA* 16, emphasis mine). Gebru's song is a lively performance, the audience's reaction validates his deeds, and the extradiegetic narrator adds: 'the admiration from the sisters-in-law…the songs of the young girls…the *geerarsa*, along with the songs, seem to have swollen Gabru's heart' (*GA* 17). This commentary alerts us to the power of the performance and the presence of audience, a power which the song itself, at least here in written form, would not be able to convey.

Later in Chapter 4, in a form of dialogic rejoinder to Gebru's *dhaaduu*, the novel presents a song by the cattle keepers, which belongs to another genre:

Gebru, a hero of Axaballa
But the 'Sanqalla' is his lord
Did he think that the blood of the 'Sanqalla' of Adare[236]
is dog's blood or cat's blood?
Whenever Gebru hunts,

[235] Axaballa is the village where Gebru lives.
[236] Adare stands for village in Gumuz.

Why does he not think twice?
For it is inevitable that he may be measured
by the very measure he uses to measure others.[237]

As in the previous examples, symbolism, metaphor (lines 3 and 4), and questioning (lines 3 to 6) are used, to demonstrate Gebru's underestimation of the Gumuz's might. For example, the interrogative statements in lines 3 to 6 point towards Gebru's mistaken perception. The first question (lines 3 and 4) questions Gebru's denigratory view of the Gumuz through symbolism (cat and dog) and metaphor (blood), while line 2 intimates that the Gumuz are far stronger than Gebru thinks. The second question (lines 5 and 6) hints at Gebru's carelessness as to the consequences of his action, and the answer is given in the form of a proverb in lines 7 and 8. This proverb reverberates with Bacangire's remark about Gebru: 'A person, who has a habit of washing themselves through others blood, swims in his own blood like a sea' (p.21). The proverb therefore dialogically links the song and the plot. This is textual evidence that the song has structural function and echoes the larger theme of the novel.

As in *Yeburqa Zimita*'s case, where the two stories of Burqa's silence and prophecy are dialogically related, the novel dialogically links the two songs through the themes of murder and revenge. The dialogic interaction between the songs contributes to the thematic complexity of the novel by presenting views that both support and oppose revenge, condemning Gebru's arrogant provocation but approving Bacangire's revenge. This is also evidenced in the words of the extradiegetic narrator, who seems to support

---

[237] *Gabruu gooftaa Axaballaa*
Sanqallaa gooftaa Gabruu…
Dhiigni sanqallaa Adaree
Dhiiga saree ti se'ee
Yokaanis kan Adurree…
Gabruun yoo adanoo deemu-
maaliif yaadee hin madaalu
Dhundhuma safaraniin-
safaramuun hin oolu…. (p.38)

revenge, at least in this context: '*Otuu oolee hin bulin tikeen* ***illee*** *weedduu itti mogaaste'(*p.38*)* [Just after a few days after Bacangire murdered Gebru, the cattle keepers ***also*** produced a song about Gebru's defeat]. The use of the word '*illee*' (also) indicates that the cattle keepers are not the first to denounce Gebru. Though the song is devised and sung by the cattle keepers while they herd the cattle, it is not about cattle but responds to a sensational important event in their community. At the same time, like the *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?*, the songs evince a high degree of literariness through an effective use of figurative language and the incorporation of a proverb for poetic and thematic purpose in the cattle song. Such use of a proverb is an uncommon technique in the context of orature-novel interface, not only in this particular novel, but also true in all the novels in this study and therefore deserves attention.

Some elements of novelized orature have more than one function in the novel. For example, the two songs in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* presented above do not only function as organizing principle but also highlight the ambivalence of the novel towards the wanton killing and retaliatory revenge.

4.2.2 Novelized orature as a mobilizing force

The examples of the *jalota* in *Yeburqa Zimita* and the *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?* can be read as means to rally and mobilize a group, in this context the Oromo, towards their political mission of throwing off Amhara rule. Mobilization works differently in the two novels. Whereas novelized orature in *Yeburqa Zimita* presents immediate and specific events and drives a located group of Oromo farmers by specifying the targeted group, in *Yoomi Laataa?* it refers to general historical realities and reminds the Oromo people to disentangle themselves from the traumatic past. The call for immediate action is rather voiced by the song penned and sung by real activist-cum-artists.[238] Another difference is

[238] These include Elfinesh Qanno, Zerihun Wedajo, Abitew Kebede, Terfasa Mitiku and others whose songs are presented in *Yoomi Laataa?*

that the stories in *Yeburqa Zimita* target an external enemy, the Amhara oppressors, whereas the *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?* is aimed at the enemy within, the Gobanas, those Oromos, who work for the Amhara rulers.

In Chapter 3 of the thesis, I have discussed the *jalota* in *Yeburqa Zimita* as an example of literary multilingualism, a trace of Afan Oromo in an Amharic text. As I have mentioned in the previous chapters, *jalota* is an Oromo wartime song. Indeed, the context in which the song is presented in the novel, when tensions between the farmers in Burqa and the Derg have reached a climax, hints at the function of the *jalota* as an instrument of mobilization, part of Oromo preparations for the long-awaited war with the Amhara. The song is disseminated along with news of the war and is thereby dialogically related to the conflict between the Amhara and the Oromo through reiteration, topical references, and narratorial commentary. Some essential preconditions are yet unfulfilled, however. The two would-be leaders, Anole and Hawani, have never returned to the village after completing their university studies, and the only indication that Burqa's farmers should begin the war is that their leader, Waqo, is sick—in the prophecy his death date is the right time to wage war.

The song uses real significant geographies, names of key personalities, and references to politically marginalized religions in order to rally the Oromo farmers. The first technique through which the mobilizing power of the song is enhanced is repetition, both at extra and diegetic narrative levels. At the diegetic levels, the song is repeated four times, each version with a slightly different thematic focus. Depending on the immediate context, in some cases, lines are dropped (Version 2) or added (Version 3), and in another case (Version 4) the order of the points addressed by the song is

reversed.[239] At the intradiegetic level, some topics are repeated throughout the four versions of the song, as I will show. Here I present the first version of the song in order to show how the above-mentioned topics presented through the song contribute to its mobilizing function. As the narrator tells us, this version begins with adults and youngsters singing:

> **Burqa, please, time is up!**
> **It's enough, please wake up!**
> *Then the elders take their turn with shivering voices.*
> ***Asalamalekum…***
> **God is friend to all**
> **Our enemy resides in Arbagugu**
> **They (the Amhara) dwell in Burqa**
> **We chop them all up.**
> *Women did not keep silent, did they!?*
> **Where are you, Anole our son?**
> **Where are you, Hawani our daughter?** (*YZ* 55 emphasis added)[240]

The song draws on real significant geographies in order to mobilize the Oromo farmers. Places such as Burqa and Arbagugu (Version 1), Kofale and Asasa (Version 3, *76*), and Arsi and Oromia (Version 4, 376) are names of Oromo lands inhabited by the Amhara. In the first version, the reference to Burqa carries more weight because this is the most important location in both the novel and the song. In a dialogic relationship with the title of the novel, which tells us Burqa is silent, the adults and male youngsters call on

[239] As I presented in Chapter 3, though the novel is written in Amharic, in all four contexts the song is presented in Afan Oromo, the original language of the song, transliterated in *Fidel* (the Amharic alphabet). No translation is offered except the first time, where the main message of the song is presented (YZ 57). On all four occasions, adults, elders, women, and youngsters participate and share the lines of the song among themselves. This signifies that the song is sung communally, which in turn reflects it is an example of orature, given that authorship cannot be attributed to an individual person. This does not mean orature is only practised as a communal literary practice, but that in this context the song is dictated by the common goal concern of singers. Communal singing, in this context, reflects a common concern and goal.

[240] The lines in bold are in Afan Oromo, and each line of the song is attributed by the narrator to a specific group in the community singing that particular line.

Burqa to end its silence (lines 1 and 2). As shown earlier, Burqa, the name of a historical river, is the main concern of the two oral stories of Burqa's silence and its prophecy. These two lines of the song are in dialogue not just with the novel as a whole, but with the two stories, particularly the story of Burqa's prophecy. In fact, the song and the story of Burqa's prophecy may appear in dialogic opposition: the story of Burqa's prophecy shows that Burqa will not break its silence until the Oromo regain their freedom, whereas the song calls for an end to Burqa's silence without fulfilling this pre-condition. The singers know the story and calling on Burqa does not mean that they are unwilling to discharge their responsibility. On the contrary, the song signals that they are ready, and they tell Burqa to be ready, too.

By the time the song is recited for the fourth time (*YZ 376*), the Derg government has collapsed and the country has been divided into ethno-linguistic regions: Oromia has become a legal name for the region inhabited by the Oromo people, while Arsi is a zone within the Oromia region which includes Cilalo, Arbagugu, Burqa, Kofale and other places formerly inhabited by the Arsi Oromo. The song therefore registers the changes in the political administrative system after 1991, and the toponyms shift from referring to mere places to evoking political significant geographies, shows how the political context influences the form and meaning of the oral text. Through such a dialogic interaction, the song, the story of Burqa's prophecy, and political history become connected to each other. This in turn increases the mobilizing power of the song by connecting it to the prophecy around which the Oromo-Amhara conflict plotline pivots. This particular version of the song as novelized orature also draws on religion (lines 3 and 4) as part of its mobilizing power, through two expressions in different languages that refer to politically marginalized religions in Ethiopia, Islam and the Oromo indigenous belief system, *Waaqeffataa*. From the perspective of dialogism and a reading together approach, this invocation of the two religions is a rejoinder to Amhara

religious supremacy in general, and specifically to the speech by the Amhara priest in Burqa who claims that God and Saint Gebriel will be on the Amhara side, and so the Amhara in Burqa should not fear but stand firm during the war with the Oromo. This point echoes the relationship between Orthodox Christianity, the religion which is usually presented as the Ethiopian state religion, and other religions in Ethiopia. In lines 3 to 7, the elders sing of their belief in the creator by using the Arabic greeting *Asalamalekum* (line 3), which hints at the presence of Islam in the area.[241] Line 4 mentions *Waaqayyoo,* the Oromo word for the creator, which is reflection of the Oromo religion. Unlike the Amhara priest, who presents God as partial, the singers of the *jalota* tell their audience that God is impartial, 'God is a friend of all'. They refrain to relate him to the war, and the audience is not told on which side he stands during the war.[242] In Version 4 (*YZ 376*), the reference to religion, particularly Islam, is foregrounded and brought to the first line of the song, echoing the ethnolinguistic federalist policy adopted after 1991 under which restrictions on religious practices were eased.

Lastly, the repeated reference to three personages who Burqa farmers consider to be their leaders—Waqo and his foster children Anole and Hawani—also enhances the mobilizing force of the song. In Version 1, Anole and Hawani are presented through questions sung by women ('Where are you, Anole our son? /Where are you, Hawani our daughter?'). In the story, we are told that the two would-be leaders have not come back yet, and people are waiting for them to begin the war. Waqo is already sick, and when this song is sung there is no leader for the Oromo to wage the war. The words

---

[241] Indeed, history has it that some Oromo people in the Arsi region adopted Islam.

[242] The use of religious expressions and references to the divine beings have more ideological and political undertones, questioning Amhara religious supremacy, according to which the Amhara are people who have a religion while the Oromo do not; Waqo (see Ch. 3) seriously questions contradiction in the Amhara religious practices. In short, dialogism here highlights differences in religious perspectives, textually indicated through the heteroglossia expressed in the Arabic and Oromo words, which contrast with Amharic expressions.

‘son’ and ‘daughter’ do not imply biological affiliation (since Anole and Hawani are orphans) but show how the people in Burqa love them dearly and treat them as their own children, for they are their future hope. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, their names metaphorically reflect the main themes of the stories of Burqa’s silence and prophecy: Anole is a memory of the earlier war; Hawani means ‘they wish’ in Afan Oromo and echoes the idea of prophecy. The questions address figuratively to Anole and Hawani, as if they were hearing them. In fact, they mark their absence from their historical responsibility at this trying time for the Burqa farmers.

Though the song aims at mobilizing the Oromo, it is mindful of the limits in the mobilization: these lines hint at the failure of this aim, and later in the novel we learn that the Oromo do not succeed in the quest for freedom that Burqa asks of them (*YZ* 378). The questions to Anole and Hawani are repeated in Versions 2 (p.57) and 3 of the song (p.76).[243] When Version 2 is sung, the narrator tells us that Burqa village is in emotional turmoil, and news about the war is being disseminated to nearby places in the Arsi region. However, the leaders have not come yet, and the people are concerned about their whereabouts. For this reason, the questions in Version 1 are retained in full

---

[243] **Version 2 (*YZ* 57):**
‘The old men sing ‘’Time is up!”
The adults take the turn “Burqa, it is enough to be silent!”
Youngsters sing “We chop our enemy up!”
Followed by the girls and women enquiring,
“Where are you our son, Anole?”
“Where are you our daughter, Hawani?”’
Version 3 (*YZ* 76):
‘Our son, Anole!
Where are you?
Our daughter, Hawani!
Where are you?
Waqo! Waqo!
Asalamalekum!
Abba Dula is a friend of all!
Our enemy is in Kofele and Asasa!
We will chop them up all…!’

in Version 2. Version 3 is striking: as the war approaches, the structure of the song changes, and it gives even more prominence and space to the three leaders, represented textually through the sentence structure.[244] Out of nine lines, six are about them. The narrative reason for presenting the names of Anole and Hawani at the very the beginning of the song is to place emphasis and pressure on them; their absence makes the singers recall Waqo (line 5), who is already dead by then. The repetition of his name followed each time by an exclamation mark (Waqo! Waqo!), shows him to be the most prominent figure in the song. Waqo's concern for the Oromo cause and the reverence bestowed upon him liken him to God and calling him a friend of all is a dialogic rejoinder to Version 1 of the song, where *Waqayyo* was presented as 'a friend of all'. The narrator supports this view by repeatedly stating Waqo's commitment.

References to Waqo, Anole and Hawani are completely absent from the fourth version, which appears much later in the novel (Chapter 13), during the second round of the conflict in Burqa.[245] This narrative absence echoes their physical absence. Waqo is dead; after the downfall of the Derg, Anole helps the farmers in secret and provides them with machine guns, while Hawani has ended her relationship with Burqa, and the farmers no longer expect her to help them. From the perspective of contextual narratology, we can read the absence of Waqo, Anole and Hawani in the light of the political condition that the Oromo faced in the early years of the TPLF-led EPRDF government, when the Oromo were without leaders. The OLF was denied the

---

[244] See fn. 31.

[245] Version 4 (*YZ*,376)

'*Asalamalekum*
God is a friend of all
Our enemy is in Burqa
The Amhara is in Oromia
The *neftenya* is in Arsi
We will raise our sword
And chop them up.'

legitimacy over Oromia by the TPLF, and this is narratively represented by Anole's fate in the narrative and the absence of the leaders' names from Version 4 of the song; instead, the region is given recognition as a larger political and geographical region.

The novel utilizes orature in this remarkable way to foreground narrative, thematic, and political issues. Significantly, the narrator's comments also change across the four versions, showing how this form of orature is not only included but novelized: in the first version, the narrator's comment contributes to the song's function as a mobilizing force. Version 3 of the song is sung by Oromo farmers conducting a rodeo when they see Anole coming. The song aims at arousing and motivating the participants, like other Oromo war songs. While they sing, the narrator tells us, the reciters 'pierce the ground with their spears' (*YZ* 57), a gesture that symbolizes the disaster yet to come. The brief commentary accompanying or interspersed with the song, foregrounds the interplay between orature and the novel. In a way it can be related to Okpewho's (1992) notion of 'digression', which he identifies as one of the main characteristics of orature. According to him, '[digression] is a device whereby the oral performer departs for a moment from the main line of the subject of a story or song either to address an object (or person) at the scene of performance or to comment on an issue which may be closely or remotely connected with the main subject' (p.96). In novelized orature, like this *jalota,* the narrator does the job of mediating between the audience and the readers and connecting the particular song, story or oral performance to the narrative.

The formal analysis of the *jalota* song in *Yeburqa Zimita* shows that repetition and variation across different versions of the song work diegetically to enthuse and mobilize the Oromo farmers at Burqa and to track the different stages of their war, from expectant hope to (partial) disappointment, while the narrative and the narrator's brief comments connect each performance to the broader political context.

4.2.3 Novelized orature as cultural treasure

In *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* orature reflects the richness of people's culture. In this section, I intentionally exclude the political aspect of culture, addressed in the previous sections. *Evangadi* narratively presents the Hamar's wise and careful management of their environment and their interaction with nature. This is presented through characterization and the description of the setting and is further enhanced by the use of two songs. The characters of Karlet, the English ethnographer, and Anteneh, an Amhara man; and of Konchiti (Lokaye's granddaughter) and Sora, both migrants who struggle to connect to the culture of the country they migrated and feel lost, all acknowledge and revere Hamar culture and traditions.

One major and appreciable aspect of indigenous people's culture is their care for their environment and peaceful co-existence with the nature, and orature aptly represent this aspect. In his article on the Guji folk songs performed by children, Tadesse Jaleta (2017) argues that folk songs are 'a cultural exercise that reflects as well as shapes the bond between human beings and their environment' (p. 292). The two songs *Evangadi* performed by two young non-literate Hamar characters, the only songs in the novel, exemplify the role of novelized orature as an imaginative means to foreground the relationship between humans and nature.

The songs are important from the point of narration/ form (direct speech) from the point of what it says (content), and because of the role they play in the narrative. They both occur in Chapter 6, as part of the childhood recollections of the Hamar protagonist Delti, which open the novel. In this chapter Delti and Dara, a Hamar girl from another village who is in love with him, meet on Mount Buska. Dara and Delti spend the night together, and after they part, Dara meditates on the happy moments they enjoyed together and then starts singing a song expressing her feelings to the moon and the stars. The song thematically enhances Delti's sweet love memory. It signifies the connection

between Dara and Delti and their environment, and how the Hamar people still enjoy their life without deprivation and without their natural habitat or other creatures. The narrator comments that Delti refrains from killing an antelope, and when he extracts honey, he is careful when dealing with the bees and feeds the bird that showed him where the honey was. The songs foreground this harmonious relationship with nature through the use of direct address to natural elements by the second person pronoun. The first is song by Dara's, followed by Delti's. Dara asks the moon and the stars to accompany her in singing and expressing her happiness:

> Though you are alone, oh moon,
> Please testify to my wish of being with the hero.
> You stars, you seem disappointed and you keep silent,
> You hate to share my happiness.

The stars blink. She saw them telling her 'keep it up![246]

> If you [stars] are willing
> Hey! Sing for us love songs,
> Please dance and let us dance together, let us feel happy.
> Whenever the hero moves around like a heifer....

Delti comes back and finds Dara dancing and singing alone. He is impressed by her dance and he sings along.

While Dara's song reflects her immersion in nature, Delti's song addresses both people and birds but also cultural elements. His song also relies on direct address:

> ... speak out, oh sky, speak out, oh earth, on what happened,
> Let the mountain speak out,
> let the forest witness
> where I have stayed the whole day.
> Baldambe, Lalombe, Galtambe…[247]
> All my friends, please speak out.
> Is Bankimoro's[248] law repudiated?
> Or his words invalidated?!

---

[246] The insertions are the narrator's and I have used italics to differentiate them from the song.

[247] Names of Delti's friends.

[248] A Hamar deity.

I have not thrown down my enemy,
I have not killed a lion or a giraffe with my gun.
Please speak out *Zergiya* – a gift from my father,[249]
Have you seen me when I feel tired or strong?
Please, birds, speak out about what you saw yesterday.
Are the principles of my father or his words needed no more ...?[250] (*E*, pp. 39-40)

The language and structure of these novelized songs attempt to reflect the characteristics of orature. Lexical parallelism, repetition (line 5), the use of figurative language mainly personification, the commentary (between lines 4 and 5, and lines 8 and 9) giving information about the performative aspects of the songs, all these elements foreground the oral qualities of the song. The main literary device used in these songs is personification, and its narrative function is to foreground the relationship between human and nature so that the difference between them gets blurred and an effect of intimacy is established.

---

[249] Gift in Hamar.

[250] '...ጨረቃ መስክሪ ብትሆኝም ብቸኛ
አይደለም ምኞቴ ለመዋል ከጀግና።
እናንተ ከዋክብት ምነው ማኩረፋችሁ፤
ደስታዬ ደስታችሁ እንዳይሆን ጠላችሁ።
እንግድያማ_እንገደያማ!
በኋ!_ ዘምሩሊን የፍቅር ዝማሬ
ጨፍሩ እንጨፍር፤ ድስ ይበለን ዛሬ።
ጀግ ናው ሲንጎማለል እንደ ኮርማ በሬ...'
....
'... ተናገር ሰማዩ፣ ተናገር መሬት ምን እንደተሰራ
ይናገር ተራራው፣ ይምስክር ደን ጫካው የዋልሁበት ስፍራ
ባልዳምሜ፣ላሎምቤ፣ ጋልታምቤ...
ጎዋደኞቸ ሁሉ እስከ ተናገሩ
የባንኪሞሮ ህግ ተሸሯል ወይ ቃሉ!
ጠላቴን አልጣልሁም
አንበሳ፣ ቀጭኔ... ተኩሼ አልገደልሁም።

ተናገር ዘርግያ የአባቴ ስጦታ
ስደክም አየሀኝ ወይስ ስበረታ
አዕዋፍም መስከሩ የትናንቱን በሉ
የአባቴ ደንብ ስርዓት ተሸሯል ወይ ቃሉ... (39,40)

Besides these folksongs, *Evangadi* presents one oral story, which expresses a very powerful aspect of Hamar culture, i.e., gendered social roles the marginalization of women from community affairs. The context of the story is interesting because it is told as part of an interaction between literate and non-literate characters. The story is prompted by the disappearance of Delti, the man Karlet had come to visit. Her Hamar friends are preparing to search for Delti, and before undertaking the journey the Hamar elders conduct a divination ritual to gather more information about Delti's safety and whereabouts. Karlet is struck by the absence of women in the ritual and asks an old man called Galtambe about it. Galtambe thinks for a while and then tells a Hamar oral story which justifies the women's exclusion from community affairs. According to Galtambe:

> Once Borjo's[251] legs got stuck in the mud, and he saw Hamar women passing near him while he was trying to get out of the mud. Borjo asked the women for help. But the women did not show him any pity, as they were busy with their tasks and engaged in their own conversation. They thought that he was joking, and told him that they were too busy to help. Borjo was disappointed and cursed them: 'May you never be up to any serious business. May you busy yourselves with insignificant tasks. May you be petulant forever.'
>
> After a while, Borjo noticed a group of Hamar men coming by. They were going to collect honey from the nearby forest. The men carried fire to keep the bees away and needed to go quickly as their fire was about to die. Borjo asked them for help, too. The men responded at once and put all their belongings aside and helped him. He blessed them: 'May you be responsible for the important business of your community. May you be able to solve the problems that your people face. May you be wise and calm.'
>
> Since then, therefore, only men have been destined to bear all responsibilities. The right of thinking, discussing and deciding on the causes and concerns of the Hamar community have been granted to men alone.[252]

[251] Borjo is the name of a Hamar deity.

[252] 'አንድ ጊዜ ቦርጆ /አምላክ/ እግሮቹ ጭቃ ዉስጥ ገብተውበት ማውጣት አቅቶት ሲታገል የሃመር ሴቶች ቅራቅቦቸውን ተሸከመው ወሬያቸውን እየሰለቁ ሲጓዙ ያያቸውና ይጠራቸዋል፤ 'እባካችሁ ከዚህ ማጥ አዉጡኝ ' ይላቸዋል። ሴቶቹ ግን ምንም ርህራሄ ሳያሳዩት 'ይእ! _ እንቸኩላለን የማነው ቀልደኛ' ብለዉት ይሄዳሉ። በዚያ ወቅት ቦርጆ አዝኖ 'ለቁምነገር አትብቁ፣ ዘላለም እንደ ቸኮላችሁና እንዳወራችሁ ኑሩ' ይላቸዋል አሉ።

This etiological tale presents a mythical explanation for the gender-based inequality practised in the Hamar community. People's belief in this cultural practice is expressed by a Hamar young woman, Goiti Anteneh, who assures Karlet that this practice is accepted by everybody and questioning it is futile, so she should not pursue the idea further.

The novel tries to retain the oral characteristics of this story both narratively and through the narrator's explicit commentary.[253] The character telling the tale relies on memory, as the pause he takes before beginning the story indicates. Galtambe employs the formulaic the expression 'once', typical of oral storytelling, to indicate the undefined past in which the story is set. Lastly, the short and simple sentence structure reflects the style of oral narratives, as was the case of the stories in *Yeburqa Zimita*. Though the structure of the sentences used by Galtambe to tell the story is not that different from that of the rest of the novel, the story does not appear to be written to be read in silence, rather it sounds as if it is orally narrated to a listener. The story signifies the Hamar's cultural richness and helps localize the novel within the Hamar's world.

The other village novel, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* also presents orature that illustrate Gumuz cultural practices. The first song occurs in Chapter 1 of the novel as part of the Gumuz culture of communal farming, and it is a work song that the Gumuz farmers sing while harvesting (see Ch. 3). In terms of tone, it is sung as playful banter but carries strong hints of the impending tragedy. It is focalized through Teto, who approaches the workers while wandering the nearby forest.[254] Instead of translating the Gumuz verses,

---

'ጥቂት ቆይቶ ደግሞ ወንዶች ለማር ቆረጣ የያዙት እሳት እንዳይጠፋባቸው እየተቻኮሉ ወደ ዱር ሲሄዱ ቦርጆ ያያቸዉና፤ 'እባካችሁ! ከዚህ ማጥ አውጡኝ' ብሎ ይጣራል። የሃመር ወንዶችም እርስ በርሳቸው ይተያዩና የተሸከሙትን አስቀምጠው፣ እሳቱም ጠፍቶባቸው ቦርጆን ከጭቃው ያወጡታል። በዚህ ወቅት ቦርጆ 'ለማህበረሰባሁ የምታስቡ፣ ችግራችሁንም የምትፈቱ አስተዋይና የረጋችሁ ሁኑ' ብሎ መረቃቸው።
ስለዚህ ከዚያን ጊዜ ወዲህ ስለ ሃመር ማህበረብ፣ የመወያየትና የመወሰን መብቱ የህመር ወንዶች ብቻ ሆነ...' አላት (212,213).

[253] The narrator says explicitly that this is an oral tale (*E*, p. 212).

[254] *Maatiyaa dumaatisiyaa qomisaa*
Eesaalskee maanjaa lumbaa

the narrator summarizes the meaning of the song in a short phrase, '*Obbolessi kee jabaataadha- akka ibidaa*' (Your brother is as strong as fire) and confirms that the song is about unforeseen tragedy (*GA* 12). Bacangire is likened to fire, for he is expected to revenge his brother Badija who was killed by Gebru. The first two lines present the main points, while lines 3 and 4 consists of ideophones, which are sounded out by all the singers as a way for everyone to join together and to motivate one another during agricultural work. The emphasis on revenge for upholding cultural norms of masculinity directly links the song to the main plot of the novel and the cultural expectation of revenge. While Teto is alone in the bush and speculates about the meaning of the song, two Gumuz girls come up to him. One teases him saying, 'you seem a lone hunter', while the other girl adds, 'we wish that you could kill and make us sing and celebrate' (*GA* 14), alluding once again to the conflict between Bacangire and Gebru. The girls' suggestions are another example of banter and reflect a definition of masculinity that indirectly praises killing and revenge. The novel's take on masculinity is that as the Gumuz equate it with bravery, revenge, and fame.[255] In short, the conversation and the song mark and punctuate important events in the culture of the Gumuz and highlight the richness of Gumuz cultural traditions.

Hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo
Hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo…

[255] For example, Bacangire and Gebru are attentive of women's insult for not showing their bravery. Gebru mentioned this in one of his songs.

4.2.4 Novelized orature as historical memory

Novelized orature can play more than one role in a novel. The story of Burqa's silence exemplifies this point: it functions as an organizing principle (4.2.1), but also serves as a historical memory of the Oromo defeat at the hands of Menelik's invading force. In fact, three examples from the two historical novels—the Gulalle displacement song and story of Burqa's silence in *Yeburqa Zimita,* and a *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?*—demonstrate how orature can serve as historical memory.[256] As I have already discussed the story, here I only focus on the songs.

The Gulalle song of displacement (*Hafe*) that I presented at the beginning of Chapter 3 as an example of literary multilingualism can also be interpreted as a historical memory.[257] The song is a collective narrative that carries the memory of the eviction of the Oromo farmers from their lands during Emperor Menelik's war of expansion. The main strategy through which historical memory is activated in the song is the use of original Oromo toponyms such as Inxoxxo, Gulalle, Tullu Dalatti, Hurufa Bombi, Gafarsa and Finfinne. All these names were changed or modified into Amharic names after 1887, when Finfinne was occupied and turned into the capital of the Abyssinian

[256] Green (2004) and Müller-Funk (2003) discuss how individual and collective memory are represented through different genres of literature including orature. This song plays the similar role.

[257] 'No more standing on Enxooxxo,
to look down at the pasture below.
No more taking cattle to Finfinne,
to water at the mineral spring.
No more gathering on Tullu Daalattii,
where the Gullalle assembly used to meet.
No more going beyond Gafarsa,
to chop firewood.
No more taking calves,
to the meadow of Hurufa Boombii.
The year the enemy came,
our cattle were consumed.
Since Mashasha came,
Freedom has vanished' (*YZ*, 273; tr. Assefa 2015,60).

rulers. In addition to these historical toponyms, the power of memory is enhanced through repetition, the dominant technique of representation in orature, as argued earlier. Throughout this song, the word '*hafe*' or 'no more' is repeated; it signifies something already dead, and the metaphor refers to the inability of the Gulalle Oromo to regain their lands, since most of them were exterminated, chased away, or assimilated after fierce resistance (Asafa 2016). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the song is not chanted or sung but simply recalled by the Oromo protagonist, Hawani Waqo. The absence of singing or performance echoes the main theme of the song, the message of no return evoked through the use of the word '*hafe*'—there will be no more performances, no more singing.

The two *geerarsas* in *Yoomi Laataa?* also represent historical memory. Unlike the Gulalle song of displacement, the *geerarsa*s do not focus on specific localities or incidents in Oromo history. Rather, they focus on the conceptual significant geography of the Oromo land, Oromia, which is a political term. The following stanza is taken from a very extended *geerarsa* presented by *Yoomi Laataa?* in Chapter 8 as part of the cultural ceremony that really took place at Inango, a ceremony that re-celebrated the *Gadaa* system after a century of suppression and was itself a historical memory.

The *geerarsa,* performed by the Wallaga Cultural Troupe, presents an array of political and historical themes and shows orature as a means of transmitting historical memories and of mobilizing the people against an oppressive government.

My hope is darkened
My wish remained unfulfilled
My question gives birth to another
The future brings in another future
The time passes and one age replaces the other
And takes turns
Emperors exchange each other
When one mounts from the left side
The other comes down through the right side

While they rotate the power among one another
One hundred years have passed.[258]

The traumatic memory of the past has destroyed the future, and the singer sings of lost hope. Memory is evoked through three metaphors: first, darkness connotes the future hope and the absence of change, expressed as a mere wish (line 1 and 2). Then, a multiplicity of questions is expressed through the idea of birth ('one question gives birth to another', line 3). Finally, we have the metaphor of exchange—one year replaces the other, kings replace one another, and so on. The reference to one hundred years is a more direct historical memory, of the time when the Oromo were occupied by the Amhara kings. No emperor is better than the other; the same oppression continues.

Whether the novels present the practice of orature among literate communities (as in *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?*) or among non-literate communities (as in *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*), they successfully transform the oral world into writing culture without undermining their orality. The language in which an element of orature is presented has an impact, too. Whenever it is presented in a language (and/or script) other than the one of the texts is, its impact is noticeably stronger. At other times such novelized orature is translated in the languages through which the novels were written—like the stories by Waqo, the stories and songs of the Hamar, or Gebru's and the herders' songs—but it still manages to reflect the worldview of the characters. Key

[258] *Abdiin dukkanooftee*
Hawwiin hawwii taate.
Gaaffiin gaaffii dhale
Boris bor dabale
Barris baraan tare
Dabaree walfuree
Mootiin walgeeddaree
Bitaan irra koree
Mirgi jala goree
Iddoo wal jijjiiree
Barri dhibbi tare (*YL* 154).

characters such as Waqo, Anole, Hawani, Anteneh and Gebru are presented as knowledgeable and respectful of the oral tradition of the societies they live in. Other narrative strategies that the novels employ to this effect include narratorial comments/ commentary on the performance context and on cultural values, direct reiteration, syntax, and visual presentation. The novels often employ sentence structures common in oral storytelling, or direct speech representation and frequency/repetition to highlight the elements of orality. In these ways, the novels resolve some of the problems posed by translation and make the oral qualities of orature more palpable. Novelized orature typically includes the personification of inanimate things, parallelism, ideograms and others. These strategies make visible the presence of orature in the novelistic narratives and impact the formal elements and themes of narratives.

4.3 Orature-literature interface in the historical and village novels

> 'But the oral–literate interface, in its various manifestations, can also be felt as a quality of the fictional works of many an African writer, reflecting either a conscious design or, as is often the case, the effect of a cultural retention determined by the African background.' (Irele 2009:1)

The four novels discussed in this chapter all foreground the interplay between orature and literature. The concept of 'novelized orature' that I have introduced early on in this chapter is intended to capitalize on the different functions of the elements of orature in the narrative development of the novelistic texts, as the examples in this chapter have shown. In order to discuss the relationship between orature and the novel, I have understood the novel as a 'mediatory' genre, and orature as novelized orature. The concept of mediation foregrounds the capacity of the novel to blend different (non-)fictional genres, like those presented in the historical novels. The interweaving of different genres—whether of orature or literature, fiction and non-fiction—in the novel for similar narrative and formal purposes makes the novel a narrative platform on

which multiple voices interact in a dialogic way. As the textual analysis of songs, tales and poems has shown, the novel is keen to retain some common literary attributes that reveal both orature and literature to be structurally sophisticated, thus undermining the notion that one is better than the other.

The concept of the novelized orature also foregrounds the relationship between orature and the novel. The use of the word novelized—which foregrounds novelistic narratives—or Obiechina's term 'narrative proverb' demonstrate the congruence or commensurability between orature and the novel. My understanding of the interface between orature and literature is that the source of imaginative or fictional expressions, in both cases, is the human mind or human imagination. The differences between them arise from the particular mode an individual or a group uses to express their imagination. Novels can successfully represent elements of orature and mediate between orature and literature in particular and between literacy and orality in general. As Abiola Irele (1990) argues, the African oral tradition makes a base for the African novelistic imagination. In this regard, orature is one of the main ways through which the world views and cultural practices of a community are manifested, preserved, promoted or discouraged where deemed unnecessary. [259]

We can capture the interface between orature and literature, this chapter has argued, by analyzing the narrative purposes to which novelized orature is put. Some novels novelize orature to present or enrich political and historical narratives, as is the case with in *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* In *Yeburqa Zimita*, Hawani Waqo, a historian, and her brother Anole Waqo help us understand how the novel draws on the Oromo

---

[259] Works by Abreham (2007); Adu-Gyamfi (1999); Akínyemí (2003); Akọma (2007); Aterianus-Owanga (2015); Barber (1991); Chiwome (1998); Curlande (1995); Falola and Ngom (2009); Furniss (2004); Jeylan (2005); Julien (1992); Okpewho (1992) show the importance and artistic sophistication of orature that help us think of orature as imaginative expressions in their own terms.

oral traditions and specific elements of orature. As we have seen earlier, Anole, an ardent Oromo nationalist, refers frequently and abundantly to the oral narratives he has heard from his foster father, including the two oral stories Waqo created. Whereas the Derg officials denounce Oromo oral knowledge as a 'nightmare', Anole values it as an imaginative form of knowledge. His knowledge of Oromo nationalism and the Oromo's relationship with the Amhara is mainly based on the oral narratives he learnt from Waqo. Anole accepts Burqa's prophecy and interprets for the Burqa people, and he later participates in the war in order to fulfil the prophecy. Orature, this implies, still hold relevance even for literate characters. Hawani's stance towards oral tradition is even more striking. As a historian trained in a mainstream academic institution, Addis Ababa University, Hawani holds more conflicting views about unwritten knowledge. As a matter of fact, she engages with and reflects on a range of textual sources, oral as well as written. She comments more than once on the relationship between oral and written forms of knowledge and imaginative expression. She hails the dominance of writing over orality, and of video recording and radio broadcasting in the preservation of history. When collecting data for her book project, she is critical of the fact that the TPLF pays little attention to writing as a means of documenting and preserving the history of the war. In the following excerpt, Hawani simply acknowledges the greater power of writing:

> Those whose history has been written, their heroism, their perseverance, and their role modelling are read throughout the world. If it is not written, it remains mere oral tradition. … Only books have an incomparable potential in preserving history. If there is a book, other things are easily produced. If there is no book, nothing is there, however. Those books inspire and shape new generations. (*YZ* 117)

At the same time, throughout the novel, Hawani never dismisses oral traditions when writing or talking about history, unlike those mainstream historians who do not acknowledge the oral histories of non-Amhara peoples. In fact, in order to write the biography of Hayelom, Hawani relies entirely on oral information from Hayelom and

his colleagues. As far as her literary preferences are concerned, we know (Ch. 1) that she loved poetry in her youth, and throughout her journey with the TPLF, there are occasions when Hawani writes or reads poems. Later she is presented as a great storyteller, as one prison scene shows (*YZ 388-90*). In conclusion, discussions of orature in the novel, for example in *Yeburqa Zimita*, reveal two conflicting perspectives: on the one hand, official views (Mengistu and his security minister) marginalize oral traditions and hierarchize the relationship between literature and orature, when they do not dismiss orature completely. On the other hand, the protagonists and the novelistic text demonstrate the inseparability of orature and literature in the development of the novelistic narrative.

Lastly, exploring the interface of orature and the novel, along with the reading together approach, opens the way for the visibility of historical and political themes brushed aside by Ethiopian national history and mainstream Ethiopian literary studies. These themes form alternative narratives that resist the dominant Ethiopianist meta-narrative which promotes a monocultural Ethiopia in which the language, literature, culture, history, and religion of one ethnic group, the Semitic Amhara, are valorized and celebrated at the expense of those of other peoples in the country.[260] Particularly in the historical novels, novelized orature is used to enhance or subvert dominant narrative themes as well as to enrich form and content. In conclusion, showing how the flexibility of orature and the novel allows them to be effectively amalgamated, the authors of the four novels demonstrate the mutual influence between orature and the novel. As the chapter has shown, orature becomes novelized and in turn localizes the novel.

[260] See Ullendorff (1973) for further discussion on this topic.

Conclusion

'…orature is inducted primarily to eschew scriptocentric representation of systems' (Anjali G. Roy 2015:41).

In order to explain the interconnection between the novel (literature) and orature, I began my argument with the two key notions: the novel and orature. I understood the novel as an unfinished genre which should not be conceived as transported, ready-made, from an established literary tradition to an emerging one but rather as a genre that is continuously remade and redefined. For example, the two authors of the historical novels, Tesfaye and Isayas, view the novel as a means through which they re-interpret, redefine and teach history. For them, it is not a closed form that they simply adapted, but one that needs to be formed or created in the new context with new materials. Oral imaginative expressions are among those new materials. This makes the novel a medley of different genres and it flexibly mediates between these genres. It is where poetry, songs and stories meet and are orchestrated towards the goal that the novel aspires to achieve. In short, the novel as a genre is mediatory in its approach and draws on different forms of orature, namely, poetry, songs, and stories in order to eschew the hierarchical relationship between orature and literature. In order to fit orature into this re-conceptualization, I draw on Obiechina's notion of the 'narrative proverb', which he uses to demonstrate the strong relationship between the two genres. However, I have preferred the term 'novelized orature' to emphasize how orature is reworked, appropriated, or dialogized in order to fit it into novelistic narratives.

To this end, in this chapter I have analyzed the functions that orature performs in the novelistic narratives, the narrative techniques through which it gets represented, and the interplay between orature and novel. In the process, I have shown that orature is as literary as the novel and other genres of literature. In the context of the historical and village novels discussed in this chapter, one can argue that novelized orature is used to

contest the script centric narratives of the Great Tradition both in form and content. Novelized orature often presents competing views and contributes to the polyphonity and dialogicity of the novels. Accordingly, a novel that novelizes more variegated forms of orature becomes more polyphonic and dialogic. The impact of orature is reflected in the form of the novels, through their use of multiple narrators, characters who speak different languages and reflect different beliefs and world views and shifting focalization. In other words, novelized orature enhances characterization, plot structure, focalization, setting, and impacts the overall narrative style by diversifying narrative points of view. It introduces a dialogism of its own, which can be called internal dialogism in Bakhtin's terms.

Besides, literary techniques such as symbolism, metaphor, repetition, digression, personification and wordplay, as well as other characteristics of the novelized orature such as the staging of performances and the presence of imagined audiences, reflect the high-level literariness of orature. Except for the presence of audience and performance, these techniques are common with novelistic narratives, and this commonality proves the similar potential of both genres. For example, *Yeburqa Zimita* uses the technique of repetition and simple sentence structure to foreground the orality of the stories (the story of Burqa's silence is mentioned about 13 times) and folk songs (the *jalota* is presented 4 times) with different narrative effects. *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Evangadi* employ the literary device of the personification of inanimate beings that has mostly been noted in the domain of orature. *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* draw on popular Oromo oral genres as the *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?* and *dhaaduu* in *Gurraacha Abbayaa*. In such a way, the novels novelize of orature utilize them for different narrative purposes.

Novelized orature also performs a linguistic role. As I have highlighted in Chapter 3, it makes the novels multilingual, contributing to their linguistic richness through linguistic traces of languages other than the ones in which the novels are written. These

range from the extreme form of mixing scripts in *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* to the less prominent traces of minority languages in *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*. In this way, these linguistic traces of novelized orature highlight the linguistic diversity of different parts of Ethiopia.

The novels presented in this chapter mediate between orature and literature by capitalizing on their shared qualities. At the same time, the novels remain mindful of and preserve some unique characteristics of novelized orature, such as performance, audience and audience reactions, and this in turn contributes to the autonomous presence of orature in the novelistic narratives. The implications of the presence of orature and its influence on the novelistic narratives are so significant that they can be interpreted as the influence of emerging literatures on established literature (Marzagora 2015). In the context of *Yeburqa Zimita*, Oromo orature influences this Amharic novel and, by extension, the Amharic literary tradition by introducing the marginal voices into the mainstream narratives. As Gera Roy (2015) puts it, 'orature is inducted primarily to eschew scriptocentric representation of systems' (p.41). In this regard, I read novelized orature in the four novels discussed as a form of literary resistance to the narratives of domination and, in the context of this study, to resist the Ethiopianist institutionalization of monolingual Geez and Amharic chirographic hegemony. This has a strong implication for the relationship between orature and literature, as it counters the evolutionary views that consider orature less complex and not sophisticated enough to represent the complexity of human thinking and imagination.

Furthermore, the contextual and multilingual reading together of the four novels' engagement with orature in view of the positionality of each novel in different linguistic and literary traditions and genres reveals some possible similarities and differences that would not come to light through conventional and monolingual comparative readings. First, from the perspective of the positionality of the novels in the Amharic and Oromo

linguistic and literary traditions, reading them together makes the role and functions of orature more prominent, particularly due to the use of original language for novelized orature. In Amharic novels *Yeburqa Zimita*, it indicates the novel's commitment to open up the dominant language's novelistic tradition to the literature of the marginalized language. In contrast, the presence of the *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?* does not to mean opening up the Oromo novelistic tradition to new voices but rather strengthening the originality, authenticity, and historicity of the themes it presents. It indicates the strong link between orature and the novel, a new genre in Oromo. In other words, it shows how the Oromo novel is an independent literary development with bases in the Oromo oral tradition and imagination. Oromo writers are not blind to Amharic literature but do not caricature the established Amharic novelistic tradition; rather, they are pretty aware of the difference between the two traditions. *Yoomi Laataa?* is an example of emerging and 'committed' literature (Casanova 2004), Oromo literature.

Amharic novels are not alone in incorporating orature from other linguistic or literary traditions. *Gurraacha Abbayaa* is an example of an Oromo novel which carries significant traces of Gumuz orature, both in Afan Oromo and in Gumuz; the novel does not deal with politics, and novelized orature there signifies the novel's realistic approach to the context it depicts. The choice of the Gumuz community as a theme and of Gumuz novelized orature marks the historical relationship between the Oromo and the Gumuz languages, which is not hierarchical as is the case with Amharic. *Evangadi*'s case presents a similar phenomenon. In other words, orature in these two village novels are used to localize or domesticate the novel to the specific cultural and social contexts.

The difference in genre impact also the novelization of orature. Though the novels belong to different linguistic and literary traditions, content and context determine the selection and use of orature, as in the case of *geerarsa* in *Yoomi Laataa?* and *dhaaduu* in *Gurraacha Abbayaa*. Both the *dhaaduu* and the *geerarsa* are war time songs, but the

novelized *dhaaduu* expresses social critique and assertion whereas the novelized *geerarsa* expresses historical memory and political marginalization.

In conclusion, focusing on the presence of orature in these novels and the reasons why the novels engage with the oral world has shown orature to be an integral part of the novels. Orature is not an antecedent to literature, but rather both play similar narrative, formal and thematic roles. This suggests that there is no convincing reason to present them as opposite or in a hierarchical relationship, though the novels like *Evangadi* tend to subordinate orature to writing/ literature. The novel and orature mutually influence each other and can develop simultaneously.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have shown that the Ethiopian literary field is a contested terrain, highly divided along linguistic lines, mainly because mainstream Ethiopian literary studies have been exclusively promoting literature in the Semitic Ethiopian languages, Geez and Amharic, and marginalizing others. Literature in the Amharic, for example historical novels, is largely shaped by the ideology of Amhara cultural and political hegemony, what is generally called the 'Great Tradition'. On top of that, the methodological approaches and literary practices promoted by mainstream Ethiopian studies follow the same trend and advocate monolingual reading practices, which in turn contributes to the marginalization of non-Amharic literatures and the erasure of other points of view, through strategies like scriptual and narrative homogenization, unidirectional or no translation, and artificially monolingual characters and environments. As a critical response to this discursive marginalization and closure of the imagination, this study has proposed a new methodological framework—a contextual and multilingual approach—which helps us explore possible links, similar patterns and echoes between novels written in two historically antagonistic literary traditions, Afan Oromo and Amharic, so as to suggest the possibility to undertake comparative studies of Ethiopian literature that cross over the monolingual 'red-lines'.

A contextual and multilingual approach integrates theories of narrative studies, such as contextualist narratology and Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia in the novel, and of world and comparative literature, such as Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies (MULOSIGE) and Reading together (Laachir), in order to address the multidimensional aspects of the novelistic narratives and the multilingual contexts in which these novels were produced. The main purpose of such a reading practice, as already mentioned, is not only to resist, but to supplement the separate and monolingual reading practices that characterize the Ethiopian literary studies. As part

of this methodological reformulation, I have employed and reconceptualized key terms, beginning with the notion of the 'novel', and including 'significant geographies', 'multilingual locals' and 'reading together'. The aim is to bring together texts in different languages and within oppositional literary traditions, which apparently do not seem to share common themes, and similar linguistic and literary backgrounds.

First of all, I understand the novel as a medley of different genres and as negotiating among a variety of genres, competing perspectives and ideologies that resist hegemonic and monolingual narratives. Besides, I adopted the three key terms of the MULOSIGE project, of which I was part, in my analysis. These key notions are underwritten by the re-imagination of space offered by Doreen Massey (2005) and recently contextualized for the study of world literature by Orsini (2015), and they encourage multilingual thinking. In the light of this new approach, what brings together the texts I present in this study is their ideological thrust (literary resistance), the political purpose most of them promote through their thematic selection and narrative techniques. Whether they are explicitly political or not, all the novels resist the homogenizing narratives of the Great Tradition, in both implicit and explicit ways. Whereas the historical novels engage in direct criticism of the Great Tradition, the village novels present more indirect and implicit resistance by focusing on the presentation of cultural practices that ignored by the Great Tradition.

Furthermore, the notion of the 'multilingual local', as Orsini (forthcoming) argues, 'makes us conscious about silences and erasures, and forces us to look elsewhere for the other texts, authors, and stories that dominant narratives leave out' (p.283). Reading through the prism of the multilingual local enables us to make visible some historical realities and multilingual practices that the narratives of the Great Tradition glosse over. The notion of multilingual local is helpful to figure out different dimensions of multilingual practices on the one hand, and the impracticality and exclusions of

monolingual policies and ideologies on the other hand. At the same time, my critical reading has aimed at activating the dialogism in each novel, so as to highlight echoes and similarities along linguistic and/or genre lines among the Amharic and Afan Oromo historical and village novels. Multilingual practices and monolingual influence/restrictions vary from context to context and have multiple faces as presented in Chapter 3. For example, the Hararge multilingual local in *Yoomi Laataa?* differs from multilingual locals in *Yeburqa Zimita* in showing Amhara landlords learning Afan Oromo, even though they down look the people and their language. *Yoomi Laataa?* presents richer multilingual locals and more diverse language ideologies than *Yeburqa Zimita*, but the latter engages more consistently with controversial policy issues such as script policy.

The contextual and multilingual approach of this study has comparatively read together the novels with a focus on the historical revisionism of the Great Tradition, the literary representation of multilingualism, and the interplay between orature and literature. These three prisms offer a 'common ground' on which the novels in Afan Oromo and Amharic can be read together. Such an approach shows how narrative and textual choices are to a degree shaped by the positionality of the novels in different linguistic and literary traditions, and in different literary genres.

A contextual and multilingual reading together of the Amharic and Afan Oromo historical novels *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* reveals how the novels pit counter-hegemonic narratives against the history of the Great Tradition by reworking and reinterpreting Ethiopian political history so as to foreground the perspectives of politically marginalized people (Chapters 1 & 2). The historical narrative in the two novels is informed by and reflect what Bahru Zewde (2000) has designated as 'new historiography', which opens

> … new avenues as local history, gender history, environmental history, and the history of ideas, to name only some of them. At the same time, it has brought about a shift in perspective, of looking at the historical experience from below rather than from above, from the point of view of the subject rather than the sovereign, the soldier rather than the general. It has also prompted historians into new sources, such as oral sources, as opposed to the archival documents that had assumed almost canonical importance… (Bahru 2000:1).

All the three points that Bahru addresses here—the kind of historical narratives, the vantage point of narration, and the sources used, are clearly reflected in the two novels and used to challenge the Great Tradition. Both novels use oral history to present the voices of the marginalized Oromo people. *Yeburqa Zimita* presents oral history as the historical memory of non-literate characters, though this history is focalized through literate characters who advocate and revere this oral history. This novel draws on a single incident of the conflict between the Oromo and Amhara in the village of Burqa. *Yoomi Laataa?* expands the scope of the historical themes presented by *Yeburqa Zimita* without focusing on a single, specific area or historical period. It also presents neglected themes such as early Oromo historical and political figures, Oromo nationalism, the Oromo indigenous way of life, and thematizes contested topics like script to write Ethiopian languages, places and memorial signs. The novel re-writes the Ethiopian national history of war, including the Civil War, from the perspective of the oppressed people.

Both novels suggest alternative approach of history writing that counter the focus of the Great Tradition on individual heroes. Whereas *Yeburqa Zimita* directly questions the emphasis that the Great Tradition places on such heroes and a centripetal, monologic historical narrative and shows how reductionist and inhibiting its approach is, *Yoomi Laataa?* employs an integrated approach which intertwines both oral and written evidence in order to incorporate the history of the people who were prevented from developing writing system and were unable to document their history in writing under

the oppressive Amhara administration. This historical revisionism is presented in narrative form through spatial re-imagination, shifting and multiple narrators and focalizors, characterization, and dialogism. The more impactful strategy is the re-imagination of space, for example, battle fields like Anole, Calanqo and Embabo in a way that foregrounds the multiplicity of stories and trajectories (Massey 2005). Such a spatial re-imagination grants agency to the marginalized peoples, like Oromo to tell their stories and experiences, and this agency is further enhanced through internal dialogism, as we have seen in the case of Hararge and Naqamte regions. This internal dialogism is also used to foreground competing views about some contested historical themes, as when Hawani wavers between the idea of democratic administration and corrupted TPLF agents in Oromia.

Interpretations of Ethiopian political history includes the Great Tradition, which posits an unbroken line of Amhara rule over three thousand years; the 'colonial thesis', which argues that Ethiopia is a colonial state; and the 'national oppression thesis', which denies internal colonialism, but argues class-based oppression (Marzagora 2017). *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Yoomi Laataa?* present and discuss these three theses in narrative form mainly through characterization, with select characters representing each thesis: whereas Anole and Sandaba represent the colonial thesis, Getaw and Asnaqe represent the Great Tradition. Hawani and Hayelom stand for the national oppression thesis. Accordingly, in both novels, the presence or absence of a relationship between characters with different ethnic affiliation symbolizes the political and historical relationship between the Amhara (associated with the Great Tradition), the Oromo and Eritreans (identified with the 'colonial thesis'), and the Tigrayan (who promote the 'national oppression thesis'). *Yoomi Laataa?* presents the unequal relationship between the Amhara and Oromo through the characters of Getaw and Sintolinna, who reflect the dominant position of the Amhara even in the Oromo lands. This is further indicated

through the names of the key characters, with almost all the Amhara characters carrying military or social titles (*Ras* Getaw, *Qenyazmach* Gizachew), whereas most Oromo have no such titles. In *Yeburqa Zimita,* relationships are more hostile and eventually result in a deadly conflict.

It is worth noting that in both novels all Amhara characters are minor characters, and in this way both the novels narratively reduce the domination of the Great Tradition. Although written in different languages the two novels echo each other in their ideological thrust. Interestingly, this historical revisionism has proved much more controversial for the Amharic novel, *Yeburqa Zimita,* forcing its author into exile. Reading together of the novels shows that Ethiopian political history, with its unequal relationship between the dominant Amhara and subordinate non-Amharas, offers a shared narrative space and the possibility to undertake comparative readings between Afan Oromo and Amharic novels.

Since multilingualism is a key notion in my methodology, the second prism through which I have read the novels together is their engagement with multilingualism and with language politics and ideologies. In order to discuss the representation of multilingualism in the four selected novels, I have drawn on two concepts: that of 'multilingual local' (Orsini) and that of 'small-scale multilingualism' (Lüpke) on the basis of the kind of multilingualism present in each genre of the novels (Chapter 3). For example, in *Yoomi Laataa?,* the Hararge multilingual local reflects a weak monolingual policy and the politically dominant groups speak the language of the marginalized majority whereas in *Yeburqa Zimita*, the Asmara multilingual local shows how people learn language other than their mother tongue for political purpose as noted in the conversation between the Eritrean and Oromo characters, Rosa and Anole. Reading multilingual representation in the historical novels through the concept of the multilingual local reveals how multilingualism serves political and ideological

purposes, which are to critique official Amharic monolingualism as part of the Great Tradition. 'Small-scale multilingualism' is more appropriate for the village novels, particularly for *Evangadi,* for it helps understand multilingual practices in the context of small-scale societies where the influence of the monolingual policy is absent. Both concepts help us understand rich multilingual practices along with their ideological and/or political underpinnings and demonstrate that multilingualism is not a site without tensions, and it operates differently in different multilingual locals. Regardless persistent monolingual influence, the novels are able to represent these multilingual complex practices and functions at the formal level through the narrative technique of direct speech representation and other textual strategies like translational mimesis (Sternberg) and mixing scripts.

The multilingual representation in each novel is also shaped by its positionality in its linguistic and literary traditions, and by its genre as well. The Amharic novels *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Evangadi* challenge the homogenizing convention of its novelistic tradition and use spatial re-imagination and characterization to highlight the multilingualism of speakers and places. Characters like Hawani, Anole, and Karlet recognize their linguistic identities and challenge the Amharic monolingualism. As for the Afan Oromo novels, *Yoomi Laataa?* uses metamultilingualism and characterization as narrative techniques to present multilingualism and to show the impact of the Amharic monolingual ideology and policy on both Amhara and Oromo characters. The case of *Gurraacha Abbayaa* is different given the non-hierarchical and non-antagonistic relationship between Afan Oromo and Gumuz language: multilingualism in the novel is a reflection of ordinary co-existence rather than domination.

In the historical novels, multilingual presence reflects the ideology and politics that govern the historical relationship between Afan Oromo and Amharic. In *Yeburqa Zimita*, for example, traces of Oromo names, toponyms, and orature expose the repressive

effacement of languages other than Amharic in official/public spaces and the linguistic homogenization of Amharic texts. Amharic traces in *Yoomi Laataa?*, by contrast, highlights the oppressive/ubiquitous presence of the official language in Oromo daily life. Whereas the two historical novels present 'subtractive multilingualism', to use Biseth Heidi's term (2008), that is the subordinate groups are forced to give up their mother tongue, the village novels show 'additive multilingualism', where the people learn other languages but continue to use their mother tongue whenever they need.

Each novel uses multilingualism for specific narrative purposes. For example, the two Afan Oromo songs in *Yeburqa Zimita*, one in Latin script and the other in the Sabean script, reflect specific political and policy issues of the periods addressed by the novels and the period in which the novel was written/published. As discussed in Chapter 3, both songs do not only reflect the authenticity of the scenes, but also the use of different scripts to write one language is more political than poetic. The song in the Sabean script reflects the authenticity of the linguistic reality where the one in the Latin script signifies resistance against script homogenization. Viewed through contextual narratology, this multilingual gesture can be read as a narrative response to the politics behind script in Ethiopia: the use of the two scripts to write Afan Oromo reflects the fact that ambivalence that during the Derg era the Oromo language was written in both scripts. The novel's choice to cite both scripts can be read as considering the possibility of using more than one script to the language without favouring one or the other; in turn, this reflets the novel's distance from either script camp. Reading together the presence of other languages in these texts reflects the possibility of co-existence of different speakers in a certain multilingual local (Giffard-Foret 2013), and in so doing the novels suggest ways to cross over the monolingual 'red lines' that I mentioned earlier.

The last major tenet of the Great Tradition that this thesis grapples with is its exclusive reliance on Amharic/Geez writing culture. By extension, oral imagination or orature in non-Amharic Ethiopian languages has been unfairly excluded from academic platforms and research by mainstream Ethiopian literary studies. Writing has been used as a yardstick to put in place a hierarchical division between Amhara and non-Amhara peoples, and to present the former as civilized people who have history and literature, while the latter lack all three things. The presence of novelized orature in these Amharic and Afan Oromo novels and the functions novelized orature has in the development of the novelistic narratives highlight how these novels broaden the remit of what constitutes Ethiopian literature, and how orature is novelized to resist the script-centred literary practice of the Great Tradition. Conceptualizing the novel as a medley of different genres and foregrounding its power to orchestrate these genres towards defined narrative goals softens the binary between orature and literature, while showing that both are autonomous artistic expressions in their own terms. In other words, orature does not need writing to be transformed into literature. Writing can contribute, say, to the preservation of orature, but it does not increase its literariness. Through this study, I have shown that novelized orature can also help counter the exclusionary definition of literature followed by contemporary scholars of world literature (Damrosch 2003 and Moretti 2000), who promote written imaginative expressions and exclude orature from their definition of (world) literature.

The multilingual aspect of such novelized orature, mainly in *Yeburqa Zimita* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* (Ch. 4), makes the narrative functions of such orature more impactful. Orature in a different language marks the presence of the multiple narrators (such as Waqo in *Yeburqa Zimita*) and characters (such as Galtambe in *Evangadi*), who introduce their different beliefs and the worldviews of their societies. From this perspective, novelized orature impacts the form of the novels in enhancing their

dialogicism and polyphony. As a result, this study disagrees with Franco Moretti's diffusionism theory of the novel: here context and local forms shape the localized novel.[261] Finally, novelized orature can be read as a means through which marginalized and resistant voices enter the novelistic narratives. Given the antagonistic relationship between Amharic and Afan Oromo, the presence of the Oromo folksongs in Amharic novel *Yeburqa Zimita* is an example of an emerging literature influencing a more established one, as well as connecting oral and written literature (Marzagora 2015b).

As far as the (unequal) relationship between literatures in different linguistic traditions is concerned, I have found Marzagora's (2015b) call for 'new epistemological connectivities' (p.43), including, between written and oral literatures relevant for my discussion.[262] For example, both the Oromo novels, *Yoomi Laataa?* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa,* draw on the popular Oromo oral genres, *geerarsa* and *dhaaduu*. This suggests that the Oromo novel is an independent literary practice connected to the Oromo oral tradition, and in that it diverges from Amharic canon novels in form and content. In short, the narrative engagement of the novels with different genres of orature indicates that orature is an integral part of the novelistic narratives. Regardless such a successful engagement between the two, the novel, as one of the dominant written genre does not always do justice to orature in its novelization as it is exemplified in Amharic novel,

[261] Franco Moretti (2000) argues that 'powerful literatures from the core constantly 'interfere' with the trajectory of peripheral ones (whereas the reverse almost never happens), thus constantly increasing the inequality of the system'. Pascale Casanova (2004) also shares such a dichotomization when she argues that 'the ''peripheral" and "newer" literatures both draw upon the older and more established literatures, seek recognition from their "centers", and rebel against them in a strategy of self-assertion' (Orsini 2015:348).

[262] Marzagora (2015b) disagrees with Casanova and argues that African scholars need to look for 'new epistemological connectivities… for connection between different African-language traditions, between African-language and European-language African literature, and *between oral and written literature'* (2015:43, emphasis added). At the same time, she calls for 'a right to disconnect'—i.e. writers from peripheries do not need recognition from the centre, rather they can keep on working on their own and challenge the centre in one or another way (ibid).

Evangadi, which puts orature to the subordinate position through its narrative homogenizing convention.

How does this thesis contribute to literary studies? First of all, it offers an example of comparative Ethiopian literature by connecting literary traditions that are perceived as completely separate, even antagonistic. It does so through its methodological approach of reading together, which is located and multilingual and is cognisant of the ideological locations of the texts and their literary fields while actively looking for traces and echoes across them. I am aware that my selection included a limited number of texts, mainly due to the shortage of the texts, particularly in Afan Oromo, that lend themselves to this new approach.[263] This is by itself an indication of the persistent impact of the Amharic monolingual ideology on Ethiopian literary studies, the problem that this study sets out to address.

This thesis also contributes to the ongoing debates on the field and study of world literature. It addresses two major points in the debates—the status of orature in literary studies and in world literature, and the centre-periphery dichotomy which leads to the peripheralization of literary works in non-western languages. The definition of world literature excludes orature as it focuses on written literature and script cultures of the Western literatures, and other literatures like Arabic, Persian, and Chinese. This exclusion, Marzagora (2015b) contends, has a strong class bias 'since readers of world literature are just a privileged minority of world readers'(p.43). In the context of Africa, a continent with low literacy rates, and of Ethiopia, this class bias is even more evident. The political implication of such a limiting understanding of literature is negative as it

[263] Since I began working on the selected novels, there are some interesting novels like Wendimu's (2016) *Yesillicha Nejiwoch* was published in Amharic which seems to present some interesting cases, say, than *Evangadi.* When I came to know these novels, I have already done more than seventy percent of my study, which made my return to them too difficult given the time to finish the thesis. Anyhow, I will consider them in my future research engagement.

suggests that orature is less literary and merely an antecedent to literature. As this thesis shows (particularly in Ch.4), this is not true: at least in Ethiopia, orature is concomitant and integral to literature, including the novel, regardless of the language in which a novel is composed.

In relation to the centre-periphery unequal relationship between literary traditions, the problem is not exclusive to world literature, but also concerns national literatures. Ethiopian literature is a telling example, mainly due to its colonial-like literary dynamics. Unlike prominent scholars like Pascale Casanova (2004) suggest, emerging or peripheralized literature does not necessarily aspire to get recognition from established or mainstream ones. Casanova's model conceives the world in terms of a few Western centres and non-Western peripheries, positing that the peripheries constantly attempt to connect with the centres. In this regard, my study shares Marzagora's (2015b) assertion that the centre-periphery model ignores 'modes of internal circulation of literary phenomena – how texts from the periphery (or from different peripheries) influence, remake, and antagonize each other' (p.43). As I have shown throughout this thesis, novels in a marginalized language like Afan Oromo engage with the centre in several, multidimensional ways: they contest the legitimacy of mainstream literature and the exclusive national status of Amharic, and in doing so they share stances and strategies with critical texts in Amharic itself. As the novels discussed in this thesis show, both Oromo and Amharic novels challenge national metanarratives, resist and even re-write historical and spatial narratives.

As presented in the introductory section, the thesis also contributes to the MULOSIGE project by expanding its methodological scope to the interface between written literature and orature and beyond the domain of world literature as it applies the MULOSIGE approach to the Ethiopian literary context, where the influence of the dominant world languages is absent. My study demonstrates that the MULOSIGE

approach is productively applicable to read comparatively literary texts in divided/split literary traditions, not only between colonial and indigenous languages, as in the case of the Maghrib, but also in indigenous languages existing in an unequal relationship to each other. MULOSIGE's advocacy of multilingualism and a multilingual approach makes it even more necessary for the study of literature where monolingualism is dominant, as in the Ethiopian context. The multilingual local approach, Orsini (2012) argues, is 'a comparative perspective that takes in both cosmopolitan and vernacular languages, both written archives and oral performances, and texts and genres that 'circulated' in the same place and at the same time although they were 'circulated' in separate traditions' (p.227). Orsini primarily used this approach to revisit literary archives in order to do multilingual literary history, but this inclusive approach is also invaluable in finding multilingualism in literary texts and fields where similar problems occur.

My study contributes to discussions of world literature from two perspectives. First, through the application and contextualization of the MULOSIGE critical concepts within a conflicted field of national literature, the study supplements MULOSIGE by providing a specific reading method that can be used to highlight how multilingualism operates in different contexts across world literatures. Literary multilingualism has received a modest attention in the study of world literature. Rachael Gilmour and Tamar Steinitz (2018:1) argue, in their edited volume on *Multilingual Currents in Literature, Translation, and Culture* that, 'existing literary paradigms ill equip us to understand the complex forces that shape language in the present as they impact upon the production and circulation of literature'. In this regard my study shares Gilmour and Steinitz (2018) idea of the 'literary-critical':

> considering literary texts which are produced in contemporary multilingual contexts, by writers moving between multiple languages: from the conditions (political, social, economic, psychic) that govern writers' language choices, to

the linguistic and formal innovations by which they register and explore linguistic diversity, and the reading strategies such writing demands' (p.5).

But while Gilmour and Steinitz draw upon translation studies and linguistics (p.2), my study draws on narratology, the theory of the novel and the study of orature to exploring multilingual practices in narrative texts. The presence of orature is particularly important, as Paul F. Bandia (2018) notes in the afterword of their volume: 'there is a strong dynamic of multilingual experiences and practices within fairly homogeneous traditional societies operating predominantly as oral cultures' (p.206). This is a lived reality in Ethiopia, and both village novels and historical novels reflect multilingualism as 'the result of internal rather than external forces'. But if, Bandia argues, multilingualism in these contexts (as opposed, say, to diasporic, metropolitan contexts), 'is at the basis of a certain degree of societal cohesion' (Ibid.206), my sample and analyses show the novels consciously employing multilingualism for critical purposes, nuancing it in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, and mobility (or its lack). The monolingualism or multilingualism of dominant characters differs from that of the oppressed. Multilingualism can mark inter-ethnic and political alliances or a benevolent paternalism.

My second contribution to the study of world literature lies in my engagement with orature in relation to the modern genre of the novel. Like national language-based literatures, contemporary world literature excludes orature from its definition and theorization as it exclusively focuses on the print and script culture of a few dominant languages. In the Ethiopian context, orature and its relationship with literature have also not been given due attention because of the Amharic-centered monolingual ideology and literary studies that exclusively promote the written tradition of the Semitic Ethiopian languages, Geez and Amharic. But, as I show in Chapter 4, the novel, whether in a literary community with a long history of writing like the Semitic Amhara or in one with a very recent history of writing such as the Cushitic Oromo in Ethiopia,

actively and extensively engages with the oral world. My study explores this engagement through the concept of the 'novelized orature'. Novelized orature proves the continued importance of orality and of oral imaginative or artistic expressions for both individuals and groups and stresses the need to acknowledge orature as a living part of literature.

In short, my multilingual and contextual approach, which takes into consideration multilingual realities and the oral world both inside and outside the novels, shows how a monolingual literary paradigm suppresses the voices of non-national or politically marginalized languages and groups and of those who rely on orality as a means of literary expression. This focus is of great import for the study of literature in other parts of the world, particularly where oral traditions and expressive forms are particularly strong. My study highlights how the authors move across linguistic boundaries and across different modality of literary expressions (orality and writing in this context) in their literary engagement. Like many other African writers, the authors addressed in this study, were born and brought up in oral communities, where they practiced orature since their childhood. When they later went to school, they became familiar with literature, and with imaginative and artistic expressions presented and circulated in the written form. These authors mediate between different modes of literary expressions. This study has focused only on one genre, the novel, but writers (and readers) also engage with the most modern and media-based (outside the purview of this study) so as to be able to do justice to their aesthetic sensibilities and multilingual worlds.

This thesis also contributes to the Ethiopian literary studies, both through its theoretical engagement and its critical arguments. Given the absence of the influence of the world languages such as English or French on the literary development in Ethiopia, literary production in the local Ethiopian languages lies outside the map of world literature.

This implies that, especially when viewed from an outsider's point of view, Ethiopian literary culture seems not only muted but non-existent, or else exclusively local and unimportant. Such systematic exclusion or peripheralization of literary culture in local languages is not only a problem in world literature studies. As already mentioned, we find a similar problem in Ethiopian literary studies, which usually homogenizes Ethiopia's diverse multilingual literary culture to Amharic/ Geez literature alone. Accordingly, only Amharic literary works have been considered Ethiopian literature. Against this background, this thesis contributes to Ethiopian literary studies by expanding their thematic scope and introducing new topics. In fact, its three main themes—the contextualist analysis of historical novels, literary multilingualism, and the orature-literature interface—are neglected in the Ethiopian academia. Through its comparative and multilingual readings, this thesis expands the scope of the comparative studies of the Ethiopian literature by including texts in the marginalized language, Afan Oromo. Though this study is not the first in comparing literary texts in Ethiopian languages, it is different in its thematic focus and approach.

Through its methodological approach, which focuses on multiple spatial imaginings (significant geographies) and multilingual traces within and across texts, it becomes possible to look for links between different, even antagonistic, novelistic traditions in Ethiopia. Thinking through multilingual locals, as Orsini argues, enables us to find silenced stories but also interrelationships, that Amharic or Afan Oromo monolingual reading practices would miss. As this thesis has shown, paying attention to the presence of Afan Oromo words in Amharic novels and of Amharic words in Afan Oromo novels makes us aware of the presence of alternative or contending world views about the topics under discussion. In this regard, the study is relevant not for Ethiopian literature in general, but also for Amharic and Afan Oromo literary studies by challenging their respective internal marginalizing monolingual reading approach.

Due to the political status of the Oromo language in Ethiopia, Oromo literature is unknown to scholars of world literature and African literatures, despite having the largest number of speakers in the country. As the first study to present a narratological reading of the Oromo novel within literary and linguistic tradition, in relation to the dominant Amharic literature, and within the historical and political context that has shaped and influenced the production of the novels, this thesis contributes to the field of Oromo studies and Oromo literature. First, it extends the Oromo literary studies beyond its linguistic confine, thereby increasing the visibility of Oromo novels, and of the Oromo world views and political ideology that inform and shape Oromo literature. Second, the context-based multilingual reading approach that thesis proposes, which takes into account form, content and context, supplements the usual monolingual reading methods of reading that the Oromo literature has been subjected to under mainstream Ethiopian studies.

Third, my contextual reading relates the reading of the Oromo novels to Oromo studies through its presentation of three core themes in Oromo studies: the critique of Ethiopian political history for its negative portrayal of the Oromo people, of the Ethiopian language policies for marginalizing the Oromo language, and of a definition of Ethiopian literature exclusively limited to the script culture of the Semitic Ethiopian languages to the exclusion of oral imaginative expressions, which are the backbone of the Oromo literary development. In other words, this study shows how Oromo novels contribute to the development of the Oromo nationalism and its ongoing resistance culture, which is the main purpose of the Oromo studies. However, beside their engagement with Ethiopian and Oromo political history, my study shows the novels' openness to multilingual realities and resistance to Afan Oromo monolingualism, and their connection to the Oromo oral tradition in ways that enlarge the scope of Oromo studies, regardless its short history of less than three decades. Fourth, through its

comparative approach and engagement with theories of world literature, this thesis attempts to link the Oromo novel to broader questions, such as multilingualism and the novelization of orature, that are germane to the study of world literature. In short, the contextual and multilingual approach that this thesis proposes can be a bridge between national and world literatures, as well as national and regional (or emerging) literatures, employing approaches developed in the context of world literature to read texts in the national and regional languages. Finally, my approach to the novels extends narrative studies/ narratology to Ethiopian literary studies (including Oromo literature), where such a literary practice is not popular. [264] Narratologists suggest that narratological studies are important in the development of the novel as a genre because narratological analyses sharpen writers and readers' understanding of the form and meaning of narratives.

Lastly, though indirectly, this thesis contributes to African literary studies, from which Ethiopian literature has largely kept apart. The Ethiopian case addressed in this study brings to the fore the comparative study of literatures in indigenous African languages that display colonial-like relationships. African language debates have tended to focus on the politics of language choice and on the influence of African languages and African orature in literary texts written in the former colonial languages. As far as language issues are concerned, my study adds to the African language debate by highlighting a situation in which the role of the colonial language is occupied by an African national language, Amharic. As I have shown, Amharic has a colonial-like dominant status in relation to other indigenous Ethiopian languages, echoing Saro-Wiwa's (1992) point: 'African languages were no less prone to yielding unequal power relations than English, as the cases of 'minority' ethnic groups in Africa demonstrated' (cited in Tunca

[264] To my knowledge, there is only one study by Demeke (2014) which employs contextualist narratology to study Amharic novels, but none for Oromo novels. My study expands Demeke's findings by taking it beyond a single linguistic literary tradition.

2014:21). But while issues of unequal resources and exclusion are germane to the Ethiopian situation, Amharic – unlike English, French, or Portuguese – does not give Ethiopian writers a wider audience or connect them to writers elsewhere in Africa. What it does give them is the support of state institutions and official ideology. Despite this important difference, my study also shows the benefits of studying Ethiopian literature in both Amharic and Afan Oromo within the broader field of African literature. In this study, I have drawn on the work of Isidore Okpewho on African orature and of Emmanuel Obiechina on narrative proverbs in the African novel. My engagement with the aesthetic and narrative effects of linguistic and stylistic choices echoes Daria Tunca's (2014) study, *Stylistic Approach to Nigerian Fiction.* Finally, my focus on conflicting representations and the crucial role of focalization in bringing suppressed historical memories and counter-narratives to the fore reflects my concern with novelistic writing as a powerful narrative form that advances truth claims while not mirroring reality. In this respect, although my theoretical and methodological coordinates are quite different, my thesis aligns with Ato Quayson's (2003) concerns in his seminal book, *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*, which presents 'calibration' as 'a form of close reading of literature with what lies beyond it as a way of understanding structures of transformation, process, and contradiction that inform both literature and society' (p.xii). It is a 'procedure of attempting to wrest something from the aesthetic domain for the analysis and better understanding of the social' (p.105).

In short, my study diversifies the themes of African and world literary studies by introducing it to the most neglected and internally conflicted areas of academic inquiry, that is, the relationships between African literatures in different indigenous languages with asymmetric status. It contributes by foregrounding how multilingualism and the interface between orature and literature through the mediation of the novel as a genre.

Last but not the least, the study has the methodological implications for the study of African and world literature. The contextual and multilingual approach that this study proposes and tests on the selected novels prioritize three major points: multilingual reality, textual and extratextual contexts (orature and political history), and context-based comparison. Such an approach challenges conventional monolingual reading practice. The implication, from this methodological perspective, is particularly significant for literatures in politically and academically marginalized languages (Afan Oromo in the case of this study) as it helps them get more visibility and enter mainstream platforms, whether at the national, continental, or world level. This implies that Ethiopian, African, and world literary studies need approaches that are cognizant of the multiple contexts that inform the production and reading of the literary texts. Hopefully, this thesis will attract others to consider these neglected literatures – whether traditional or emerging – by showing that they are complex literary traditions grappling with linguistic diversity.

References[265]

Abbas, Haji. 1994. 'Menelik's Conquest as the Genesis of Ethiopian Crisis: A Case of the Arsi Oromo'. *The Oromo Commentary* 4(2).

Abbe, Gubenya. 1968. *And Lennatu ['His Mother's only Son'].* Addis Ababa. Berhannena Selam Press.

Abdullahi, Shongolo, and Waaqoo Jaarsoo. 1996. 'The Poetics of Nationalism: A Poem by Jaarso Waaqo Qoot'o'. In *Being and becoming Oromo: historical and anthropological enquiries,* edited by P.W. Baxter, J.Hultin & A.Triulzi. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 265-90.

Abreham, Alemu. 2007. 'Oral Narrative as Ideological Weapon for Subordinating Women: The Case of Jimma Oromo'. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 19(1):55–80. Doi: 10.1080/13696810701485934.

Addisu, Tolesa. 1990. *The Historical Transformation of a Folklore Genre: The Geerarsa as a National Literature of the Oromo in the Context of Amhara Colonization in Ethiopia*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International.

______ . 1999. *Geerarsa Folksong as the Oromo National Literature: A Study of Ethnography, Folklore, and Folklife in the Context of the Ethiopian Colonization of Oromia*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press.

Adu-Gyamfi, Yaw. 1999. 'Orality in Writing: Its Cultural and Political Function in Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian Poetry'. PhD Thesis. University of Saskatchewan.

Afewerk Gebreyesus. 1908 [republished in 1958 under the title *Ṭobbya*]. *Ləbb Welled Tarik* ['Story of the heart'], Rome.

---

[265] Ethiopian authors are listed by the first names and all the years of publication are in the Gregorian calendar though Ethiopia has its own calendar which is 8 years behind the Gregorian.

Akínyemí, Akíntúndé. 2003. 'Yorùbá Oral Literature: A Source of Indigenous Education for Children'. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16(2):161–79. Doi: 10.1080/13696850500076195.

Akọma, Chiji. 2007. *Folklore in New World Black Fiction: Writing and the Oral Traditional Aesthetics*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Alastair, Pennycook, and Makoni Sinfree. 2007. *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages.* Clevedon & Buffalo. Multilingual Matters.

Alber, Jan, and Monika Fludernik, eds. 2010. *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.

Alemseged, Abbay. 2004. 'Diversity and State-Building in Ethiopia'. *African Affairs* 103(413):593–614. Doi: 10.1093/afraf/adh043.

__________. 2013. 'Is Multilingualism a Problematic Paradigm in Ethiopia?' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 19(2):233–49. Doi: 10.1080/13537113.2013.788919.

Aleqa, Taye. 1972. *The History of the Ethiopian People (in Amharic)*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press.

Allen, G. 2000. *Intertextuality*. London. Routledge

Andrzejewski, B. W. 2011. 'Modern and Traditional Aspects of Somali Drama'. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 23(1):85–95. Doi: 10.1080/13696815.2011.581461.

Anteneh, Aweke. 2014. 'The Representation of Ethiopian Politics in Selected Amharic Novels: 1930 - 2010.' PhD Thesis, UNISA.

Araia, Ghelawdewos. 2012. *What Language Should Ethiopians Speak?* Columbia University, Institute of Development and Education for Africa (IDEA), Inc.

Asafa, Jalata. 1995. 'The Emergence of Oromo Nationalism and Ethiopian Reaction'. *Social Justice* 22(3 (61):165–89.

______. 1996. 'The Struggle for Knowledge: The Case of Emergent Oromo Studies'. *African Studies Review* 39(2):95. Doi: 10.2307/525437.

______ . 1998. *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*. Lawrenceville (NJ). The Red Sea Press.

_______. 2001. 'Ethno-Nationalism and the Global "Modernising" Project'. *Nations & Nationalism* 7(3):385.

_______. 2007. 'The Concept of Oromummaa and Identity Formation in Contemporary Oromo Society'. *Sociology Publications and Other Works.* https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_socopubs/10.

Asafa, Jalata, and Harwood Schaffer. 2010. 'The Ethiopian State: Authoritarianism, Violence and Clandestine Genocide'. *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3(6):160–89.

Asafa, Teferra. 2003. 'Towards a Political Sociology of Oromo Literature: Jaarsoo Waaqoo's Poetry'. MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

_______. 2019. 'A miniature Oromo academy in exile': How former slaves pioneered Oromo studies. *Mulosige*. http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/oromo-folklore-studies/

Asfaw, Damte. 2011. '*Beferenjinya Binitsifis?*' [Why not we write in English?]. *Bilen: Ye Itophiya Derasiyan Mahiber Yesinetsihuf Metsihet*, *Special Issue* (7): 59–62.

______. 1981. Modern Amharic litertaure: The first phase. *Yekatit*, *4*(4).

Assefa, Tefera. 2015. 'Ethnography of Resistance Poetics: Power and Authority in Salale Oromo Folklore and Resistance Culture, Ethiopia, Northeast Africa'. PhD Thesis, Indiana University.

_____. 2018. 'Oromo Social Resentment: Re-Envisioning Resentment Theory, an African Perspective.' *Journal of Pan African Studies* 11(6):96-122.

______ . 2009. '*Eela': Seenaa Oguma Oromoo* [History of Oromo literature]. Addis Ababa.

Far East Trading, PLC.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York. Routledge.

Aterianus-Owanga, Alice. 2015. '"Orality Is My Reality": The Identity Stakes of the "Oral" Creation in Libreville Hip-Hop Practices'. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27(2):146–58. Doi: 10.1080/13696815.2014.987222.

Ayele, Bekerie. 2003. 'Historical Overview of Ethiopic Writing System's Possible Influence on the Development of the Armenian Alphabet'. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1(1):33–58.

Ayele, Kebede. 2019.The Ethiopian Writers' Association: Between Multilingual Openings and Monolingual Practice. *Mulosige*. http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/ ethiopian- literary -studies/

Baalu, Girma. 1983. *Oromai*. Addis Ababa: Mankusa Publisher.

______. 1970. *Kadmas Bashager [Beyond the Horizon]*. Addis Ababa: Mankusa Publisher.

Bachner, Andrea. 2016. 'Cultural Margins, Hybrid Scripts Bigraphism and Translation in Taiwanese Indigenous Writing'. *Journal of World Literature* 1:226–44.

Bahru, Zewde. 2002. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991*. Columbus: Ohio University Press.

______. 2000. 'A century of Ethiopian historiography', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 33 (2): 1-26.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Austin, Tex: Univ. of Texas Press.

______. 1984a [1972]. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

______. 1984b. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail, Medvedev, and Voloshinov. 1994. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, edited by P. Morris and G. Roberts. London: Arnold, a member of the Hodder Headline Group.

Bal, Mieke. 2009. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theories of Narrative*. 3rd ed. Toronto, Bufalo, London: Toronto University Press.

Bandia, P.F. 2018. 'Afterword'. In *Multilingual Currents in Literature, Translation and*

Culture, edited by R. Gilmour and T.Steinitz. New York and London: Routledge, pp 206- 214.

Barber, Karin. 1991. 'Quotation in the Constitution of Yorùbá Oral Texs'. *Research in African Literatures* 30(2):17–41.

Baxter, P. 1986. 'The Present State of Oromo Studies: A Résumé'. *Bulletin Des Études Africaines de l'INALCO* 6(11):53–82.

______ . 1978. 'Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo'. *African Affairs* 77(308):283–96.

______ . 1986. 'Giraffes and Poetry: Some Observations on Giraffe Hunting among the Boran'. *Paideuma* 32:45–63.

Bekers, Elisabeth. 2014. '"Bearing Gifts of Words": Multilingualism in the Fiction of Flemish-Nigerian Writer Chika Unigwe'. In *Challenging the Myth of Monolingualism*, edited by L. Minnaard and T. Dembec. Leiden: Brill, 117–32.

Bender, John. 1987. *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press.

Bender, M. Lionel. 1985. 'Ethiopian Language Policy 1974-1981'. *Anthropological Linguistics* 273–79.

Bender, M. Lionel, Robert Leon Cooper, and Charles A. Ferguson. 1972. 'Language in Ethiopia: Implications of a Survey for Sociolinguistic Theory and Method1'. *Language in Society* 1(2):215–33.

Berhanu, Zerihun. 1966. *YeTewodros Enba* [*Tewodros's Tear*], Addis Ababa: Berhanenna Selam Press.

Bhatia, Tej, and William Ritchie, eds. 2012. *The Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism*. Second Edition. New York. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Boletsi, Maria. 2014. 'The Barbarism(s) of Multilingualism: Outweirding the Mainstream in Guillermo Gómez-Peña's Performance Literature'. In *Challenging the Myth of Monolingualism*, edited by L. Minnaard and T. Dembec. Leiden: Brill, 149–70

Bridgeman, Teresa. 2007. 'Time and Space'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by D. Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 52-65.

Casanova, Pascale. 2004 [1999]. *The World Republic of Letters (République mondiale des lettres*). London: Verso.

Caulk, R. (1971). The Occupation of Harar: January 1887. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, *9*(2), 1–20.

Cenoz, Jasone. 2004. 'Multilingualism and the Role of English in a Post-9/11 World: A European Perspective'. *The Modern Language Journal* 88(4):622–24.

_______. 2013. 'Defining Multilingualism'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 33:3–18. Doi: 10.1017/S026719051300007X.

Cerulli, Enrico. 1922. *Folk-Literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Chatman, Seymour. 1990. 'What Can We Learn from Contextualist Narratology?' *Poetics Today* 11(2):309–28. Doi: 10.2307/1772619.

Chiwome, Emmanuel Mudhiwa. 1998. 'The Interface of Orality and Literacy in the Zimbabwean Novel'. *Research in African Literatures* 29(2):1–22.

Clapham, Christopher. 2002. 'Rewriting Ethiopian History'. *Annales d'Éthiopie* 18(1):37–54. Doi: 10.3406/ethio.2002.1013.

Clift, J. 2021. 'Political Pasts: The 'Historical-Fictional' in Hindi and Urdu Literature, c. 1930- 1960.' PhD Thesis. SOAS University of London.

Clyne, Michael. 2011. 'Multilingualism, Multiculturalism and Integration'. *Multiculturalism and Integration: A Harmonious Relationship* 53–71.

Cornils, Anja, and Wilhelm Schernus. 2003. 'On the Relationship between the Theory of the Novel, Narrative Theory, and Narratology'. In *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*.Ed by T. Kindt and H. Müller. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 134-174.

Crummey, Donald. 2001. 'Ethiopian Historiography in the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century: A North American Perspective'. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 34(1):7–24.

Curlande, Harold. 1995. *Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humor of Africa.* Marlowe & Co.

Damrosch, David. 2003. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

______. 2007. 'Scriptworlds: Writing Systems and the Formation of World Literature'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 68(2):195–219.

Dannenberg, Hilary. 2008. *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction*. Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska.

Darby, David. 2001. 'Form and Context: An Essay in the History of Narratology'. *Poetics Today* 22:829–52.

_____. 2003. 'Form and Context Revisited'. *Poetics Today* 24:423–37.

Dawson, Paul. 2017. 'Delving into the Narratological "Toolbox" Concepts and Categories in Narrative Theory'. *Style* 51(1):228–46.

_____. 2018. 'Introduction: Narrativizing Novel Studies, Historicizing Narrative Theory'. *Poetics Today* 39(1):1–16.

De Bleeker, Liesbeth. 2014. 'Translating Space in Narrative Fiction: Patrick Chamoiseau's Martinique Seen from a Dutch and English Perspective'. *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 23(3):227–43. Doi: 10.1177/0963947014536502.

Degineh, D. 2015. 'The Development of Oromo Writing System'. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Kent.

Demeke, Tasew. '2014. Narrative Strategies in Selected Amharic Novels from 2000 until 2010.' PhD Thesis. UNISA.

Demitu, Argo. 2016. 'Oromo Art as a Politcal Resistance'. h*ttp://www.ogina.org/Issue4.Html*.

Dereje, Gebre. 2011. 'Ye Itopiya Derasiyan Mahiber Alamawoch, Tegdarotochina Tikit Yemeftihe Hasaboch' [The Objectives of the Ethiopian Writers' Association and Some Suggestions on Its Problems]. *Bilen: Ye Itophiya Derasiyan Mahiber Yesinetsihuf Metsihet*, 10–13 (Amharic).

Dhaba, Wayessa. 1993. *Godaannisa (The Scar)*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam.

_______. 1996. *Gurraacha Abbayaa (A Black Man from Abbaya)*. Washington DC: Fettan Printers.

Ebbisa, Adunya.1988. *Geerarsa*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOmz_US8Mz0

Endalkachew, Hailu. 2017. 'A Deconstructive Reading of Ideology in Selected Post-1991 Amharic and Afaan Oromo Novels'. PhD Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Eshete, Gemeda. 2016. *African Egalitarian Values and Indigenous Genres. A Comparative Approach to the Functional and Contextual Studies of Oromo National Literature in a Contemporary Perspective.* Zurich. Lit Verlag.

Ezekiel, Gebissa. 2002. 'The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire, and Oromo Nationalism: The Significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936'. *Northeast African Studies* 9(3):75–96.

______, eds. 2008. *Contested Terrain : Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse and Politically Engaged Scholarship*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

_______. 2016. 'The Big Debate - Beyond Assimilation and Accommodation: The Resurgence of Oromo Nationalism'. *Addis Standard*, November 7.

Ezekiel, Gebissa, and Jalata Asafa. 2003. 'Fighting against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements'. *African Studies Review* 46(3):182. Doi: 10.2307/1515079.

Falola, Toyin, and Fallou Ngom, eds. 2009. *Oral and Written Expressions of African Cultures*. Durham, N.C: Carolina Academic Press.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.1995. *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa. Berhannena Selam.

Feyisa, Demie. 1995. 'Special Features in Oromiffa and Reasons for Adopting Latin Scripts for Developing Oromo Orthography'. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 2(1 & 2):22–29.

______. 1996. 'Historical Challenges in the Development of Oromo Language and Some Agenda for Future Research'. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 3(1 & 2):18–27.

Finnegan, Ruth. 1973. 'Literacy versus Non-Literacy: The Great Divide?' In *Modes of Thought, Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies*, edited by R. Horton and R. Finnegan. London: Faber and Faber, 112-44.

_____. 1992. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

_____. 2005. 'The How of Literature'. *Oral Tradition* 20(2):164–87. Doi: 10.1353/ort.2006.0004.

Fiqremarqos, Desta. 1998. *Evangadi*. Addis Ababa.

______. 1995. *Kebuska Bestejerba [Behind the Buska]*. Addis Ababa. Commercial Printing Press.

Fludernik, Monika. 1993. *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness*. London: Routledge.

______. 1996. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. London: Routledge.

______. 2000. 'Beyond Structuralism in Narratology: Recent Developments and New Horizons in Narrative Theory'. *Anglistic* 11(1):83–96.

______. 2009. *An Introduction to Narratology*. London and New York: Routledge.

______. 2012. 'The Narrative Forms of Postcolonial Fiction'. In *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature.*, edited by Ato Quayson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 903-37.

______. 2018. 'Ideology, Dissidence, Subversion: A Narratological Perspective'. In *Narratology and Ideology Negotiating Context, Form, and Theory in Postcolonial*

Narratives, edited by D. Dwivedi, S. Nielsen, and R. Walsh. Columbus: Ohio State University Press,193-212.

_____. 2011. 'The Category of 'Person' in Fiction: You and We Narrative-Multiplicity and Indeterminacy of Reference' . *Current Trends in Narratology*, edited by Greta Olson, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 101-142.

Foster, Leonard. 1970. *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foucault, Mitchel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*. New York: Pantheon.

Friedman, Maurice. 2001. 'Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogue of Voices and the Word That Is Spoken'. *Religion and Literature* 33(3):25–36.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. 1989. 'Lyric Subversion of Narrative in Women's Writing: Virginia Woolf and the Tyranny of Plot'. In *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*, edited by J. Phelan. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 162-85.

Furniss, Graham. 2004. *Orality: The Power of the Spoken Word*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gaddisa Birru. 1991. *Kuusaa Gadoo [A Pile of Resentment].* Addis Ababa. Artistic Printing Press.

Gardner-Chloros, Penelope, and Daniel Weston. 2015. 'Code-Switching and Multilingualism in Literature'. *Language and Literature* 24(3):182–93. Doi: 10.1177/0963947015585065.

Garuba, Harry. 2009. 'The Critical Reception of the African Novel'. In *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 243-62.

Gemechu, Megersa. 1996. 'Oromumma: Tradition, Consciousness and Identity'. In *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquires*, edited by P. T. Baxter, J. Hultin, and A. Triulzi. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute,92-102.

George, Olakunle. 2009. 'The Oral–Literate Interface'. In *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, edited by A. Irele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,15-30.

Gerard, Albert. 1968. 'Amharic Creative Literature: The Early Phase'. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 6(2):39–59.

______. 1971. *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic*. Los Angeles. University of California Press.

Giffard-Foret, Paul. 2013. 'Linguistic Hybridity and a Multilingual Australia in Merlinda Bobis' Poetry'. *Creative Industries Journal* 6(1):29–41. Doi: 10.1386/cij.6.1.29_1.

Gilmour, Rachael and Steinitz, Tamar.2018. 'Introduction: Multilingual Currents'. In *Multilingual Currents in Literature, Translation and Culture*, edited by R. Gilmour and T.Steinitz. New York and London: Routledge, pp 1-15.

Goody, Jack. 1987. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Gow, Greg. 2002. *The Oromo in Exile: From the Horn of Africa to the Suburbs of Australia*. Carlton South, Australia: Melbourne University Press.

Green, Anna. 2004. 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory": Theoretical Presuppositions AndContemporary Debates'. *Oral History* 32(2):35–44.

Griefenow-Mewis, Catherine, and Bitima Tamene, eds. 2004. *Oromo Oral Poetry Seen from Within*. Köln: R. Köppe.

Habib, Rafey. 2005. *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. Malden, Blackwell Publishers.

Hable, Selassie. 1972. *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia United.

Haddis, Alemayehu. 1966, *Fiqir Eske Meqabir ['Love unto the Grave']*, Addis Ababa: Berhanenna Selam.

Harlow, Barbara. 1987. *Resistance Literature*. New York, London: Methuen.

Hatcher, John. 2012.' Fiction as History: The Black Death and Beyond'. *History.* 97(325):3-23.

Hayward, Richard J., and Hassen Mohammed. 1981. 'The Oromo Orthography of Shaykh Bakri Sapphalo'. In *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*. Vol. 44, *3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 550-66.

Helms, Gebriele. 1996. 'Dialogism, Cultural Narratology and Contemporary Cnadian Novels in English'. PhD Thesis, The University of British Colombia, Vancouver, Canada.

______. 2003. *Challenging Canada:Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Hiedi, Biseth. 2009. Multilingualism and Education for Democracy. I*nternational Review of Education* 55:5-20. DO1 10.1 007/sl 1 1 59-007.

Herman, David. 2002. *Story Logic. Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska.

______. 2003. 'Regrounding Narratology: The Study of Narratively Organized Systems for Thinking'. In *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory.,* edited by T. Kindt and H. Müller. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 303-332.

______, ed. 2007. *Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holcomb, B., and Ibsa Sisai. 1990. *Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*. Trenton, NJ. Red Sea Press.

Horstkotte, Silke. 2005. 'The Double Dynamics of Focalization in W. G. Sebald's T*he Rings of Saturn*'. In *Narratology beyond Literary Criticism*. Vol. 6, *Narratologia*, edited by J. C. Meister. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter,25-44.

Hunde, Dhugasssa. 2012. *Tesfaye Gebreab: The man who created the first Oromo main character in the history of the vast Amharic literature.* ZeHabesha Ethiopian News. https://zehabesha.com/tesfaye-gebreab-the-man-who-created-the-first- oromo-main-character-in-the-history-of-the-vast-amharic-literature/

Hutcheon, Linda. 2004. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Irele, Abiola. 1990. 'The African Imagination'. *Research in African Literatures* 21(1):49–67.

______, ed. 2009. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Isayas, Hordofa. 2010. *Yoomi Laataa?* [*When Shall It Be?]* Finfinne: Ethiopian Writers Association.

Jaenen, Cornelius. 1956. 'The [Oromo] of East Africa'. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 12(2):171–90.

Jahn, Manfred.2009. 'Focalization'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative,* edited by D.Herman. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Jeylan, Weliye. 2005. 'The Functions of African Oral Arts: The Arsi-Oromo Oral Arts in Focus'. *African Study Monographs* 26(1):15–58.

______. 2006. 'A Critical Review of the Political and Stereotypical Portrayals of the Oromo in the Ethiopian Historiography'. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15(3):256–76.

______. 2008. 'The Politics of Language, Power and Pedagogy in Ethiopia: Addressing the Past and Present Conditions of the Oromo Language'. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 28(1):31–57. Doi: 10.1080/07268600701522772.

Julien, Eileen. 1992. *African Novels and the Question of Orality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

_____. 1995. 'African Literature'. In *Africa*, 3rd edition, edited by Phyllis M. Martin & Patrick O'Meara. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 295-312.

_____. 2006. The Extroverted African Novel. In *The Novel: History, Geography and Culture,* edited by Franco Moretti. Princeton & Oxford. Princeton University,667-702.

Kaschula, Russell. 1997. 'Exploring the Oral-Written Interface with Particular Reference to Xhosa Oral Poetry'. *Research in African Literatures* 28(1):173–91.

Kassam, Aneesa. 1986. 'The Fertile Past: The Gabra Concept of Oral Tradition'. *Africa* 56(02):193–209. Doi: 10.2307/1160632.

Keen, Suzanne.2003. *Narrative Form*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kim, Myungjin. 1999. ‘Dialogism in Charles Dickens’ First-Person Narratives: A Bakhtinian Study’. PhD Thesis, The University of Minnesota.

Kinser, Samuel. 1984. ‘Chronotopes and Catastrophes: The Cultural History of Mikhail Bakhtin’. *The Journal of Modern History* 56(2):301–10.

Kumssa, Asfaw. 1990. ‘A Reinterpretation of Oromo History’. *Africa Today* 37(4):79–80.

Kurtz, Robert. 2007. ‘Debating the Language of African Literature: Ethiopian Contributions’. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 19(2):187–205. Doi: 10.1080/13696810701760468.

Laachir, Karima.2016. ‘The Aesthetics and Politics of “Reading Together” Moroccan Novels in Arabic and French’. *The Journal of North African Studies* 21(1):22–36. Doi: 10.1080/13629387.2015.1084098.

______ .2019. ‘The Literary World of the North African Taghriba: Novelization, Locatedness and World Literature’. *Journal of World Literature* 4:188–214.

Laachir, Karima, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini. 2018a. ‘Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies: For a Ground-up and Located Approach to World Literature’. *Modern Languages Open* 2018(1). Doi: 10.3828/mlo.v0i0.190.

______. 2018b. ‘Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature’. *Journal of World Literature* 3(3):290–310. Doi: 10.1163/24056480-00303005.

Laachir, Karima, and Saeed Talajooy, eds. 2012. *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures: Literature, Cinema and Music*. New York: Routledge.

Lanser, Susan. 1986. ‘Toward a Feminist Narratology’. *Style* 20(3):341–63.

______. 1992. *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Larissa, Aronin, and David Singleton. 2012. *Multilingualism*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Levine, Donald. 1974. *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

______. 2011. ‘Ethiopia’s Nationhood Reconsidered’. *Análise Social* 46(199):311–27.

______. 2012. ‘A Revised Analytical Approach to the Evolution of Ethiopian Civilization’. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 6(1/2):29–70.

Lüpke, Friederike. 2016. ‘Uncovering Small-Scale Multilingualism’. *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 4(2):35–74.

MacKay, Marina. 2010. Narrating the novel. In *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge Introductions to Literature). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,39-59. Doi:10.1017/CBO9780511781544.006.

Marcus, Amit. 2008. ‘We Are You: The Plural and the Dual in “We” Fictional Narratives’. *Journal of Literary Semantics* 37(1):1–22.

Margolin, Uri. 2000. ‘Telling in the Plural: From Grammar to Ideology’. *Poetics Today* 21(3):591–618.

Markakis, John. 2011. *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*. PLACE Boydell & Brewer Ltd.

Marzagora, Sara. 2015a. Literatures in African languages. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27(1):1-6. DOI: 10.1080/13696815.2014.978842.

______2015b. ‘African-Language Literatures and the “Transnational Turn” in Euro-American Humanities’. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27(1):40-55. DOI: 10.1080/13696815.2014.926450.

______. 2015. 'Alterity, Coloniality and Modernity in Ethiopian Political Thought: The First Three Generations of 20th Century Amharic Intellectuals.' PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London.

______. 2017. ‘History in Twentieth Century Ethiopia: The “Great Tradition” and the Counter- Histories of National Failure’. *The Journal of African History* 58(03):425–44. Doi: 10.1017/S0021853717000342.

______. 2019. 'Ethiopian intellectual history and the global: Käbbädä Mikael’s geographies of belonging (1940s-1950s)'. *Journal of World Literature*, 4 (1), pp. 107-128.

Marzagora, Sara, and Kebede Ayele. 2019. 'Literary Networks in the Horn of Africa: Amharic and Oromo Intellectual Histories'. In *Routledge Handbook of African Literature*, edited by M. Adejunmobi and C. Coetzee. Cambridge University Press, 429-42.

Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For Space*. Sage.

McIntire, Gabrielle. 2005. 'Heteroglossia, Monologism, and Fascism: Bernard Reads *The Waves'*. *Narrative* 13(1):29–45.

McNab, Christine. 1990. 'Language Policy and Language Practice: Implementing Multilingual Literacy Education in Ethiopia'. *African Studies Review* 33(3):65. Doi: 10.2307/524187.

Mekonnen, Zegeye. 2001. Images of Women and Plot Structure in the First Four Novels of Fikre Markos Desta. MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Mekuria, Bulcha. 1994. 'The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the Histrory of Written Afaan Oromo'. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 1(2):91–115.

______.1995. 'Onesimos Nasib's Pioneering Contributions to Oromo Writing'. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 4(1):36–59.

______.1997. 'The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict over the Status of Afaan Oromoo'. *African Affairs* 96(384):325–52.

Melakneh, Mengistu. 2005. *Map of African Literature*. Addis Ababa: Branna Enterprise.

Mengistu, Lemma. 1965. 'Modern Amharic Literature: The Task Ahead'. *Voice of Ethiopia*, May 19, 1965.

______ .1973. 'From Traditional to Modern Literature in Ethiopia'. *Zeitschrift Fur Kulturaustausch*, 81–83.

Merolla, D. 2014. 'Introduction: Orality and Technauriture of African Literatures'. *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde* 51(1):80. Doi: 10.4314/tvl.v51i1.8.

Milkessa, Midaga. 2015. 'The Politics of Languages and Representative Bureaucracy in Ethiopia: The Case of Federal Government'. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 7(1):15–23.

Mohammed, Ademo. 2016. 'Afran Qallo Band Marks 50 Years of Making Music and History'. *OPride: News,Views and Pubic Service*. Retrieved (http://www.opride.com/oromsis/news/3583-afran-qallo-band-marks-50-years-of-making-music-and-history.).

Mohammed, Hassen. 2008a. 'A Brief Glance at the Torturious Development of Written Oromo Literature'. In *The Road Less Travelled*. Trenton, NJ. The Red Sea Press, Inc, 207-44.

______. 2008b. 'Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo: A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s-2002'.In *Contested Terrain : Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse and Politically Engaged Scholarship*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 23-66.

_____ . 1990. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

______. 2010. 'Orature, Resistance, and Nationalism : A Historical Overview of the Development of Written Oromo Literature'. *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 17(1):137–77.

______. 2012. 'Revisiting Abba Bahrey's" The News of the Galla"'. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45(2):273–94.

______. 2014. 'Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo: An Oromo Muslim Cultural Icon'. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 31(3):93.

Mollenhauer, Shawn Michael. 2011. 'Millions on the Margins: Music, Ethnicity, and Censorship among the Oromo of Ethiopia.' PhD Thesis. University of California, Riverside.

Molvaer, R. 1997. *Black Lions: The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia's Literary Giants and Pioneers*. Asmara: Red Sea Press, Inc.

______. 2003. 'Ethiopian Literature'. In *Encyclopaedia of African Literature*, edited by S. Gikandi. London, New York: Routledge,246-50.

Montes-Alcalá, Cecilia. 2015. 'Code-Switching in US Latino Literature: The Role of Biculturalism'. *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 24(3):264–81. Doi: 10.1177/0963947015585224.

Moolla, F. Fiona. 2012. 'When Orature Becomes Literature: Somali Oral Poetry and Folktales in Somali Novels'. *Comparative Literature Studies* 49(3):434–62.

Moretti, Franco. 1998. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900.* London : Verso,.

_____. 2000. 'Conjectures on World Literature'. *New Left Review* 1:54.

_____.2005. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. Verso.

Morson, S., and C. Emerson. 1990, eds. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Müller-Funk, Wolfgang. 2003. 'On a Narratology of Cultural and Collective Memory'. *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33(2):207–27.

Nagaso, Gidada. 1983. 'Oromo Historical Poems and Songs: Conquest and Exploitation in Western Wallaga,1886-1927'. *Paideuma: Mitteilungen Zur Kulturkunde, Bd.* 29:327–40.

Nebyu, Gebre Michael. 2012. 'Structural Analysis of the Evolutionary Motif, Portrait and Discourse of National Identity in the *Kebra Nagast, Tobbiya* and *Dertogada*.' MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Nünning, Ansgar. 2003. 'Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Uses of the Term'. In *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, edited by T. Kindt and H. Müller. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 239-75.

______ .2004. 'Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology'. *Style* 38(3):352–74.

______ . 2009. 'Surveying Contextualist and Cultural Narratologies: Towards an Outline of Approaches, Concepts and Potentials'. In *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, edited by S. Heinen and R. Sommer. Berlin: De Gruyter, 48-70.

Obiechina, Emmanuel. 1992. 'Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel'. *Oral Tradition* 7(2):197–230.

Okpewho, Isidore. 1992. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Charcater, and Continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ong, Walter J. 2002. *Orality and Literacy.* London: Routledge.

Orsini, Francesca. 2014. 'Traces of a Multilingual World: Hindavi in Persian Texts.' In *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India*, edited by Francesca Orsini and Semira Sheikh. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

______. 2012. How to do multilingual literary history? Lessons from Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century north India. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, *49*(2), 225–246. Doi: 10.1177/001946461204900203.

______. 2015. 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature'. *Comparative Literature* 67(4):345–74. Doi: 10.1215/00104124-3327481.

______. 2017. 'Reading Together: Hindi, Urdu, and English Village Novels'. in *Indian Literature and the World. eds. Ciocca R. and Srivastava N.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

______. Forthcoming. *A multilingual local in world literature: Literature and history in Awadh.*

Orsini, Francesca, and Laetitia Zecchini. 2019. 'The Locations of (World) Literature: Perspectives from Africa and South Asia: Introduction'. *Journal of World Literature* 4(1):1–12. Doi: 10.1163/24056480-00401003.

Pankhurst, Richard. 1967. *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

______. 1976. 'The Beginnings of Oromo Studies in Europe'. *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi e Documentazione Dell'Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* (2):171.

Patterson.1985. 'Mikhail Bakhtin and the Dialogical Dimensions of the Novel.' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 131–139.

Perham, M. 1969. *The Government of Ethiopia*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.

Pratt, Mary Louise. 1977. *Toward Speech Act Theory of Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

______. 1986. 'The Ideology of Speech Act Theory'. *Poetics Today* 7:59–72.

Prince, Gerald. 2014. 'Narratology and Translation'. *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 23(1):23–31. Doi: 10.1177/0963947013510647.

Quayson, Ato. 2003.*Calibrations: Reading for the Social*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. 1983. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics.* London : Methuen.

Ronen, Ruth. 1986. 'Space in Fiction'. *Poetics Today* 7(3):421–38.

Roy, Gera. 2015. 'The Folktale in Achebe's Fictions'. In *Oral Tradition in African Literature*, edited by C. Ce and C. Smith. Nigeria: Hnadel Books, 30-50.

Rudin, Ernst. 1996. *Tender Accents of Sound. Spanish in the Chicano Novel in English*. Tempe Arizona: Bilingual Press.

Sahle Sellassie, Berhane Mariam. 1982. 'Talking of Language and Literature'. *Yekatit* 6(1): 19–21.

______. 1964. *Shinega's Village: Scenes of Ethiopian Life*. Califonia. University of California Press.

Saro-Wiwa, Ken.1992. 'The Language of African Literature: A Writer's Testimony', *Research in African Literatures*, 23(1): 153–7.

Semir, Yusuf. 2009. 'The Politics of Historying: A Postmodern Commentary on Bahru Zewdes History of Modern Ethiopia'. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3(9):378–83. doi: 10.5897/AJPSIR.9000125.

Shen, Dan. 2005. 'Why Contextual and Formal Narratologies Need Each Other?' *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35:141–71.

Shen, Fu-Yuan. 2006. 'Narrative Strategies in Robert Cormier's Young Adult Novels'. PhD Thesis, The Ohio State University.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. 1981. 'Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories'. In *On Narrative*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell. Chikago: University of Chicago Press, 209-32.

Sorenson, John. 1993. *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Steinby, Liisa, and Tintti Tintti. 2013. *Bakhtin and His Others: (Inter)Subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism*. Anthem Press.

Sternberg, Meir. 1981. 'Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis'. *Poetics Today* 2(4):221–39. doi: 10.2307/1772500.

Strecker, Ivo.1970. *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia: III: Conversation in Dambaita.* Klaus Renner.

Sturm-Trigonakis, Elke, Athanasia Margoni, and Maria Kaisar. 2013. *Comparative Cultural Studies and the New Weltliteratur*. Ashland, US: Purdue University Press.

Sumner, Claude. 1995. *Oromo Wisdom Literature.* Addis Ababa : Gudina Tumsa Foundation,.

______. 1996. *Proverbs, Songs, Folktales: An Anthology of Oromo Literature*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation,.

Taddesse, Adera, and Jimale Ali. 1995. *Silence Is Not Golden: A Critical Anthology of Ethiopian Literature*. Red Sea Press.

______, eds.2008. *The road less travelled: Reflections on the literatures of the Horn of*

Africa. Leiden. Red Sea Press.

Tadesse, Jaleta. 2017. 'Oral Poetry as Herding Tool: A Study of Cattle Songs as Children's Art and Cultural Exercise among the Guji-Oromo in Ethiopia'. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29(3):292.

Tamene, Bitima. 1983. 'On Some Oromo Historical Poems'. *Paideuma, BD* 317–25.

Tamrat, T. 1972. *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Tawada, Yoko. 2014. 'The Script of a Turtle or the Problem of Translation'. In *Challenging the Myth of Monolingualism*, edited by L. Minnaard and T. Dembec. Leiden: Brill, 171-80.

Taye, Assefa. 2009. 'An Overview of ICES Papers on Ethiopian Literature, 2000-2007'. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 42(1/2):107–40.

Taye, Assefa, and Shiferaw Bekele. 2000. 'The Study of Amharic Literature: An Overview'. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 33(2):27–73.

Taylor-Batty, Juliette. 2013. *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Teferi, Nigussie. 2006. '*Development of Oromo literature up to 1991'*. MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

_____. 2015. 'The Representation of "Ethiopianness" and "Oromoness" in Two Oromo-Language Novels: Yoomi Laataa by Isaayas Hordofaa and Kuusaa Gadoo by Gaaddisaa Birruu'. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27(1):84–97. Doi: 10.1080/13696815.2014.975107.

Tekle Tsadik, Mekuria. 1959. *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia, Axum and Zagwe (in Amharic)*. Addis Ababa: Artistic.

_____. 1961. *A History of Ethiopia from Emperor Yekuno Amlak to Libne Denegel (in Amharic)*. Addis Ababa: Artistic.

_____. 1968. *A History of Ethiopia from Emperor Tewodros to Haile-Selassie (in Amharic)*. Addis Ababa: Artistic.

Tesfaye, Gebreab. 2000. *Yeburqa Zimita (Burqa's Silence)*. Addis Ababa: Mega Publishing Enterprise.

______.2014. *Reflection on Yeburqa Zimita*. Oromo Studies Association, Washington DC. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4oze7r__o

Tesfaye, Tolossa. 2009. 'A History of Written Literature in Afaan Oromo to 1991'. MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.

_______. 2019. 'A Histry of Oromo Literature and Identity Issues (c.1840-1991)'. PhD Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Teshome Egere. 2013. 'A feminist reading of selected novels in Afan Oromo: A study in deconstruction.' PhD Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Tewodros, Kiros. 2004. 'Ethiopian Literature'. In *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* edited by A. Irele and S.Gikandi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1:164–77.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ Wa. 2007. 'Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature'. *Performance Research* 12(3):4–7. Doi: 10.1080/13528160701771253.

Tilahun, Gamta. 1993. 'Qube Affan Oromo: Reasons for Choosing the Latin Script for Developing an Oromo Alphabet'. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 1(1):36–40.

Titzmann, Michael. 2003. 'The Systematic Place of Narratology in Literary Theory and Textual Theory'. In *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, edited by T. Kindt and H. Müller. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter,175-204.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1969. 'Structural Analysis of Narrative'. *Novel* 3:70–76.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin : The Dialogical Principle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Toggia, Pietro. 2008. 'History Writing as a State Ideological Project in Ethiopia'. *African Identities* 6(4):319–43. Doi: 10.1080/14725840802417869.

Torres, Lourdes. 2007. 'In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino Writers'. *MELUS* 32(1):75–96. Doi: 10.1093/melus/32.1.75.

Triulzi, Alessandro. 2002. 'Battling with the Past: New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography '. In *Remapping Ethiopia: socialism and after*, edited by W James at al., Ohio University Press, Athens (OH), 276-288.

Tunca, Daria.2014. *Stylistic Approaches to Nigerian Fiction*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ullendorff, E. 1960. *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_______ . 1951. 'Studies in the Ethiopic Syllabary'. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 21(3):207–17. Doi: 10.2307/1156593.

_______. 1968. *Ethiopia and the Bible*. London: Oxford University Press.

_______. 1973. *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*. 3rd ed. London: Oxford University Press.

Vice, Sue. 1997. *Introducing Bakhtin*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Wako, Fugich. 2010. '"Putting down" Women with Male Oratory: An Analysis of an Oral Poetic Form among the Boorana Oromo'. *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 17(1):179–217.

Wendimu, Kebede. 2016. *Yesillicha Nejiwoch*. Addis Ababa. Mega Publishing Enterprise.

Weston, Daniel, and Penelope Gardner-Chloros. 2015. 'Mind the Gap: What Code-Switching in Literature Can Teach Us about Code-Switching'. *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 24(3):194–212. Doi: 10.1177/0963947015585066.

White, Hayden. 1973. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore,MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Williams, James. 2017. 'Polyglot Passages: Multilingualism and the Twentieth-Century Novel'. PhD Thesis. Queen Mary University of London.

Wolde-Selassie, H. 2007. *Ethiopian History: From Queen Sheba until the Victory of Adwa*. Addis Ababa: Central Priting Press.

Wold-Mesqel, M. S. 1950. *Zekre Neger (in Amharic)*. Addis Ababa: Freedom Press.

Woloch, Alex. 2003. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Yismake, Worku. 2009. *Dertogada.* Addis Ababa. Itafizer Printing.

Yonas, Admassu. 1995. 'Narrating Ethiopia: A Panorama of the National Imaginary'. PhD Thesis. University of California.

______. 2010. 'What Were They Writing About Anyway?: Tradition and Modernization in Amharic Literature'. *Callaloo* 33(1):64–81.

Young, Robert. 2013. 'World Literature and Language Anxiety'. In *Approaches to World Literature*. Vol. 1, *WeltLiteraturen/World Literatures Series,* edited by Joachim Küpper. Berlin: Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 27-38.

Zelalem, Aberra. 2003. 'Transition from Oral to Written Oromo Poetry'. *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 10(1 & 2).

Zirimu, Pio. 1998. 'Oral Power and Europhone Glory: Orature, Literature, and Stolen Legacies'. In *Ngu˜gı˜ wa Thiong'o Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Zoran, Gabriel. 1984. 'Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative'. *Poetics Today* 5(2):309–35.